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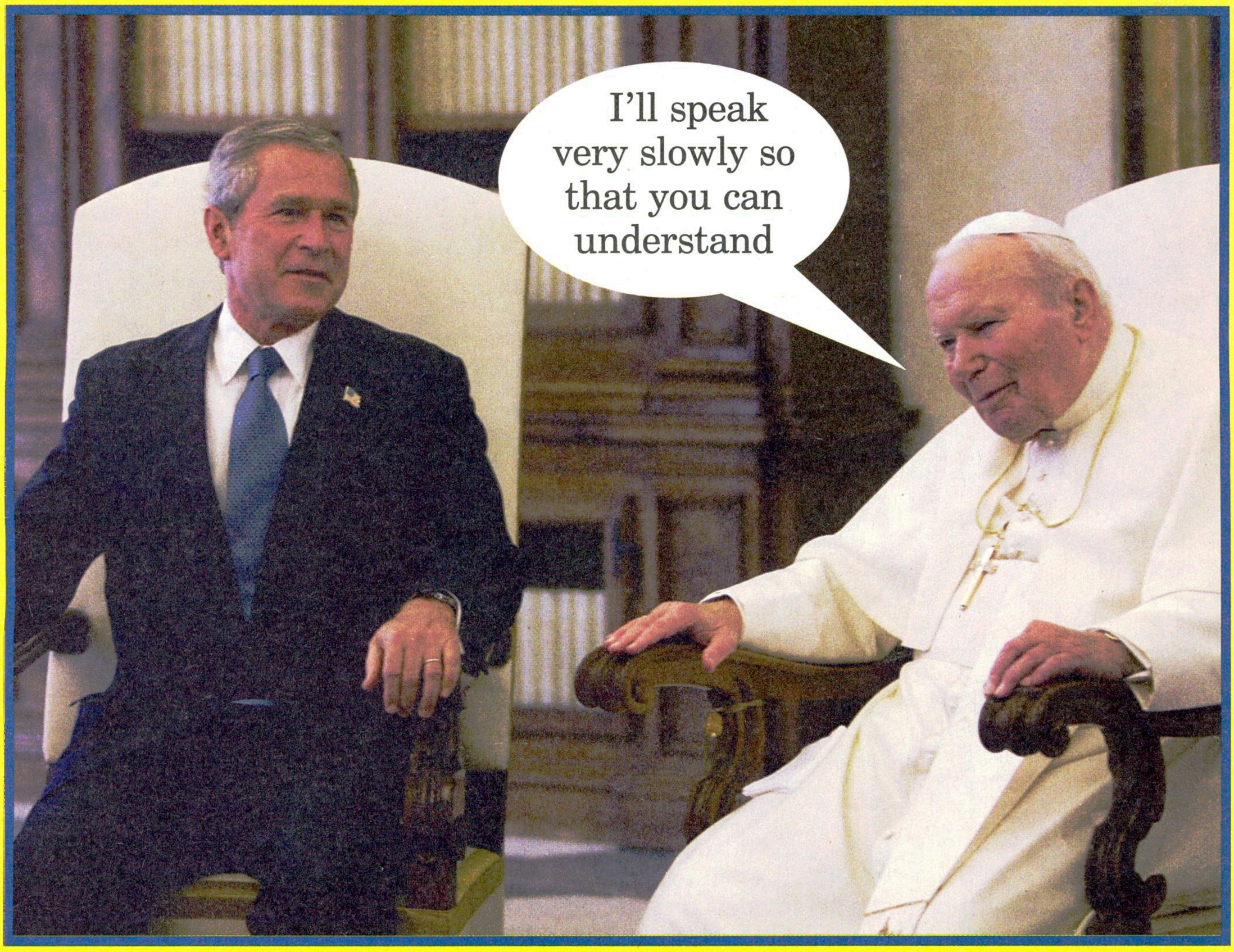
DUBYA MEETS POPE



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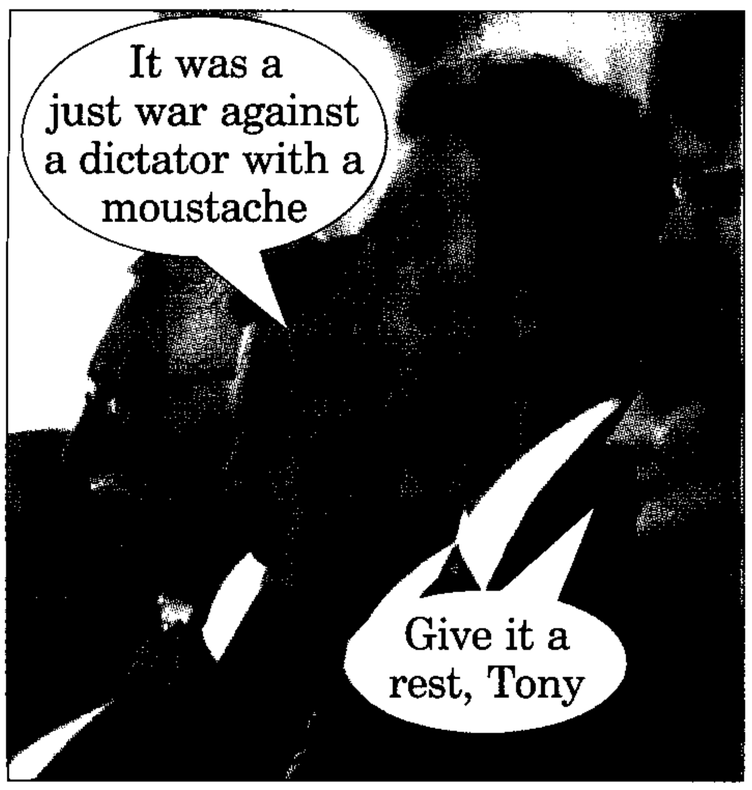

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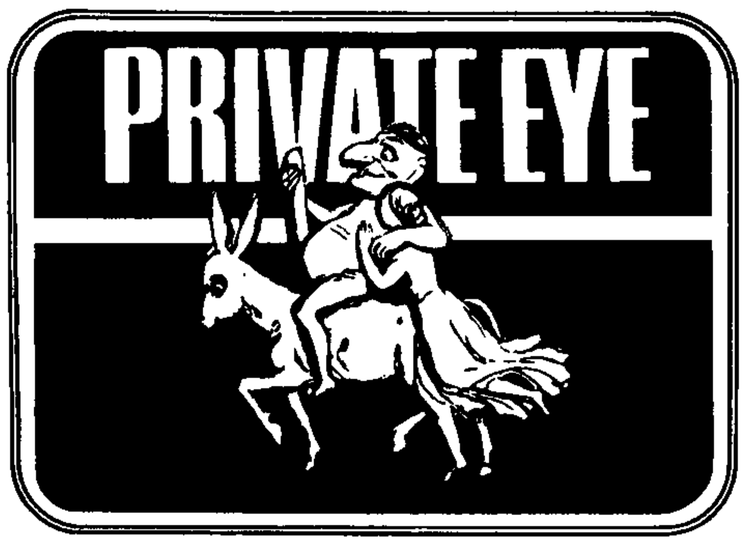

Poll position

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THE stocks are sold, the press is squared, the middle class is quite prepared – or so Prince Charles hopes, as he launches his new campaign to prepare us for his marriage to gorgeous pouting Camilla.

The propaganda offensive began with a huge front-page splash in the *Times* last Thursday. It credited an anonymous friend of the prince, "authorised to speak on his behalf", with the less than astonishing revelation that Charles and Camilla have "discussed marriage". But the real point of the story was its claim that the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, had dropped his objections to a wedding after "secret talks with the prince last year". The paper helpfully noted the General Synond's recent agreement that there are exceptional circumstances where a divorcee with an ex-spouse still alive can remarry in church.

Alas, the *Times* overlooked a couple of inconvenient facts. One is that the General Synod explicitly excluded the marriage in church of couples where one partner's adultery had led to the breakdown of the other's marriage. Secondly, the *Eye* can reveal that the "secret talks" between the Prince and Archbish were so secret that even Dr Williams himself was unaware of them. He has not "dropped his objections" to a royal marriage, nor has he *ever* discussed the subject with Prince Charles.

CONGRATULATIONS to Ian Watmore, managing director of consultancy firm Accenture, who has been made head of the cabinet office's new "e-Government Unit" where he will be in charge of "improving the delivery of electronic public services".

Does the name ring a faint bell? As a partner at Accenture (then known as Andersen Consulting) in the 1990s, Watmore oversaw a legendary IT cock-up: the NIRS2 project to modernise the national insurance computer system. It ran three years behind schedule, the original projected cost of £134m rose to more than £300m, and the Inland Revenue had to pay £100m compensation to people who had lost contributions to their pension funds because the new system hadn't paid national insurance rebates in time.

Cabinet office minister Douglas Alexander said last week that Watmore's arrival in Whitehall will ensure that "the government capitalises on the potential of ICT to both transform service delivery and achieve a step change in operational efficiency across the public sector". If the NIRS2 fiasco is anything to go by, service delivery and operational efficiency will indeed be transformed – though perhaps not quite in the way Alexander intends.

IT WAS rather rotten of the *Independent* on 27 May to publish the names of all 21 firms wanted by the regulator for their role in the split capital investment trusts scandal.

The financial services authority (FSA) had wanted to keep the names out of the public eye. But now they're out, two awkward matters arise.

The first concerns Jupiter Asset Management, manager of the Jupiter split trust and one of the biggest firms refusing to pay the compensation demanded by the FSA. While the FSA pursues Jupiter, however, the department of trade and industry has promoted one of its more prominent directors.

On 19 April, Gordon Campbell was appointed chairman of British Nuclear Fuels, a controversial publicly-owned company. He gets £165,000 a year for a two-day week, which will give him plenty of time to continue his work as non-executive director of the board of Jupiter Asset Management. BNFL's main job is to run the veteran Magnox power stations, so the appointment by industry secretary Patricia Hewitt of a chairman with a truly capitalistic approach to risk is, to say the least, imaginative.

Another firm on the list of split capital trusts not cooperating with the FSA is Framlington Dual Investment Trust, chaired by the Rt Hon Nicholas "Fatty" Soames MP, the Tory Party's defence spokesman.

THE most hated man in US boardrooms at the moment is Eliot Spitzer, New York state's attorney-general.

Hard on the heels of his humiliation of investment banks for fiddling their research comes his announcement that he is to sue GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), one of Britain's biggest drugs companies, for poisoning New York's children with its "anti-depressant" Seroxat.

In 2002, Spitzer has discovered, two million prescriptions for Seroxat (known in the US as Paxil) were written for US children, generating revenue of nearly £30m. News that the firm is to be sued in the US led to an immediate fall of 33p in GSK's share value in London. GSK directors were furious with Spitzer – and they will be even more furious as more and more documents are surrendered on discovery.

While some documents already uncovered by prosecutors show that GSK knew of the dangers its drug caused to children and merrily went on marketing it, some GSK chiefs in Britain are worried Spitzer's initiative might be followed here. But who would do it?

Britain has no equivalent of a state attorney-general and the possibility that the director of public prosecutions, the attorney-general, the serious fraud office (SFO) or anyone else would prosecute such a huge company on the trivial charge of poisoning children is unlikely.

After all, when Spitzer challenged the investment banks and fined them $1.4bn, Sir Howard Davies, chairman of the financial services authority (FSA), counselled against such precipitate action here. Then he retired from the FSA and joined the board of Morgan Stanley, one of the erring banks.

IRAQ's new government with added sovereignty, which takes the reins on 30 June, has said it wants to review the role of foreign private military companies – or mercenaries as they're more commonly known – which currently operate under the same local legal immunity that US, British and other coalition forces enjoy.

One of their first targets may be a UK-South African outfit called Erinys (see *Eyes passim*). Erinys Management recruited about 350 foreign soldiers, many of them from apartheid South Africa's special forces. These soldiers command about 14,500 Iraqi soldiers. But most interest in Baghdad surrounds the manner in which Erinys secured an $80m contract last year from the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to guard oil installations. To the fury of Erinys' competitors, this newly-formed company didn't have to go through any competitive tendering arrangements and had had no experience in the Middle East.

Erinys South Africa formed a joint venture – Erinys Iraq – with Faisal Daghistani, the son of Tamara Daghistani, who was one of Ahmed Chalabi's most trusted confidantes. She helped create Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress. Erinys' lawyer in Iraq is Chalabi's nephew, Salem Chalabi. In Bagdad, Erinys is referred to as Chalabi's private militia.

Most surprising of all, last month Erinys was re-awarded the private security contract for another year by the CPA just three weeks before US deputy defence secretary Paul Wolfowitz publicly denounced Chalabi and about six weeks before the CPA was due to be wound up. The successor regime may be less impressed by Erinys' military record.

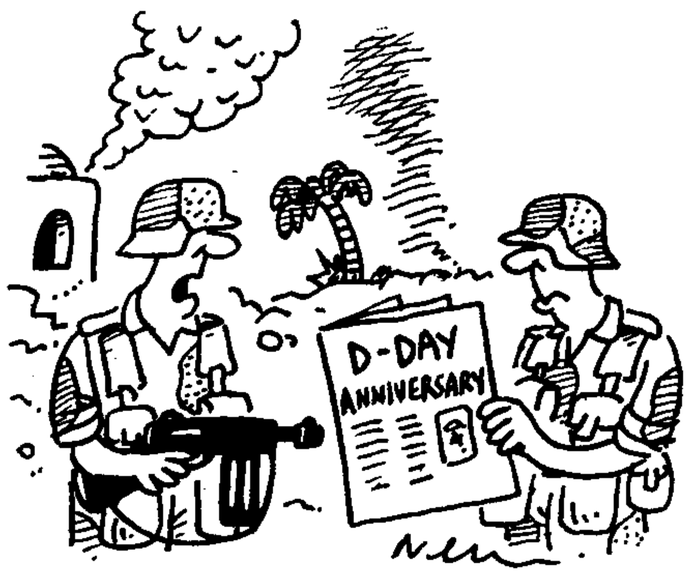
THE Tories' former foreign and defence secretary Malcolm Rifkind made a lot of sceptical noises about the government's support for the war in Iraq. But that hasn't stopped him becoming the first top Tory to profit from the war.

Rifkind, set to return to parliament in the safe Tory seat of Kensington, questioned the need for war before it began. But back in April he took on a new job (to add to his existing five directorships) as chairman of ArmorGroup, which is just one of the private military companies (PMCs) working in Iraq.

AT LAST a major breakthrough in the war against terrorism: a press release from the coalition forces' HQ in Afghanistan reveals that Kabul Golf Club is now open for business for the first time since the 1970s. Experts have cleared the 18-hole course of landmines, artillery pieces, multiple-rocket launching systems and abandoned Soviet tanks.

Golf, we learn, "will bring the country back to the days of democracy" by teaching players "a sense of tolerance, patience and hard work". Turning swords into ploughshares – or, rather, mashie niblicks – is apparently integral to the US army's disarmament plan. The club's professional, Mohammad Afzal Abdul, claims that "troops of a local commander, Mullah Ayzat, have already turned in several weapons".

But will they remember to replace the divot?



"At least we weren't late coming into the war this time"

Street of Shame

LIKE so many newspaper barons, Sir David Barclay seems to support a free press only so long as it doesn't write about himself. Hence his fury at a brief item in the *Evening Standard* Londoner's Diary last month which noted that Sir David, one of the Barclay twins bidding for the *Telegraph* group, was "not in the best of health" and had ordered medical equipment to be delivered to his house in the Channel Islands.

Barclay's lawyers, Lovells, have despatched a thunderous letter to the *Evening Standard* – and, for good measure, to its stablemates the *Daily Mail*, *Mail on Sunday* and *Metro* – saying that he was "extremely distressed to read the piece", which represented "a clear invasion of Sir David Barclay's privacy".

It puts the papers on notice that if they ever again allude to Barclay's health "then they risk proceedings for breach of privacy being brought against them, including for aggravated damages". Lovells also demand an undertaking by Associated Newspapers that it will never publish "the details already published" or "any further details about his state of health".

Happily Associated Newspapers is refusing to promise anything of the kind, reckoning that if a man wishes to run the *Telegraph* group then his physical fitness to do so is a matter of legitimate interest.

Eye readers may also recall what happened four months ago when a Delaware judge wished to ask Sir David Barclay why he had concealed "extremely important information" and released other information "of questionable accuracy" about his secret dealings with Conrad Black. As Judge Strine noted in his verdict: "Despite his daily and vigorous pursuit of the *Telegraph* assets over many months, David Barclay claimed to be too ill to be deposed. [Hollinger] International respected this claim, once it was medically documented, although the record in the case casts doubt on this assertion."

In short, Barclay himself drew attention to his ill-health – and even produced medical documentation – to avoid testifying. If he continues to invade his own privacy in this way, we trust Messrs Lovells will send him a threatening letter.

JUST FANCY THAT!

January 1994: George Galloway visits Saddam Hussein. "Sir, I salute your courage, your strength, your indefatigability," he drools.

December 1999: George Galloway spends Christmas in Iraq with his friend Tariq Aziz, Saddam's deputy prime minister.

7 June 2004: George Galloway writes to the *Guardian*, protesting at a reference to his "shameful links with Ba'athist Iraq". "I never had any kinds of links with the Ba'athist regime," he insists.

ARRIVING online some six years after most of its competitors, the *Daily Mail* is eager to point out that its new website, dailymail.co.uk, is a wholesome alternative to the filth which lurks elsewhere on the internet.

A daily advert in the paper encourages readers to log on to "your favourite family website" and last Friday encouraged children to check out the latest Harry Potter trailer online.

On the site's homepage they could also enjoy a run-down of the latest Big Brother action – "viewers could see movement under the duvet, accompanied by whimpers of pleasure from Michelle"; a set of photos of "glamour model Jodie Marsh wearing a tiny five-inch belt – and leaving nothing to the imagination"; and a selection of pictures of corpses and bloody dismembered limbs taken from "the scariest films of all time!"

THE *Independent*, more than most newspapers, went to town in its coverage of the BBC exposé of transfer payments made by Manchester United to Alex Ferguson's son, Jason. It was therefore particularly ironic that the correspondent it should have chosen to profile Jason the controversial agent was none other than Alan Nixon.

As *Eye* readers will recall, Nixon is also a shareholder in ProActive Sports, the football agency run by his friend Paul Stretford. In 2001, he wrote a flattering profile of the company for the *Indie* in which he hailed Stretford's "global ambitions" and lauded his "down-to-earth style".

Over the next year several more puffs for ProActive appeared under Nixon's byline, including the signing of teen prodigy Wayne Rooney and the news that another client, Korean Jung-Hwan Awh, would shortly be joining a premiership club – though this never occurred.

PS: In his profile Nixon had the chutzpah to describe relations between the club and Ferguson's Elite Sports Agency as "all very cosy".

***DAILY Express* editor Peter "Mentally" Hill has many powers, one of which appears to be an ability to see the future – specifically his own.**

Hit by a volley of recent NUJ chapel meetings calling on management to stop cutting staff and maintain the title as a benchmark of excellence (*sic*), boat-loving Hill is reported to be telling his closest allies in the Grey Lubyanka that his brief tenure as master and commander of the *Express* will end in September.

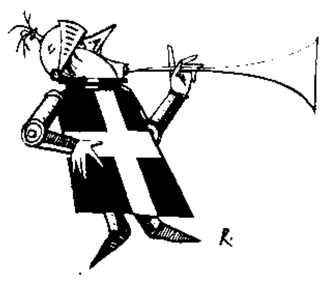
Under his stewardship, aided by Richard "Dirty" Desmond's swingeing cuts to editorial budgets, the *Express* is lower in the water than at any time in its history. The situation is so bad that hard-pressed galley slaves wonder if the *Express* itself will sink before September, saving Hill from walking the plank.

"SCHOOLCHILDREN suffering from dyslexia have seen dramatic improvements in their development thanks to a physical exercise programme designed to stimulate the brain... run by the Dore Achievement Centre in Kenilworth, called DDAT," reported Nick Britten in the *Daily Telegraph* on 21 May.

"At the end of the study they were found to be free of dyslexic symptoms, no longer needed help in class, and could join mainstream lessons."

Impressive. But perhaps Britten had himself had difficulty reading the words of the *Telegraph*'s education editor John Clare in his own paper just six days earlier, when Clare advised a parent to "waste no money on DDAT... Dore's claim to have 'found the answer to dyslexia and other learning difficulties' is absurd."

EYE TOLD YOU SO



WELL DONE the *Times*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror*, which on 3 June featured the story of David Grey, whose facetious farewell email when he left his job with Wear Valley district council led to him being arrested by armed police for making "threats to kill".

They ran the tale just ten days after it was published in the *Eye*'s own Rotten Boroughs column. Had hacks at all three papers been catching up on their reading a week after most *Eye* subscribers? Far from it. They had lifted the story from the wires of the Press Association, an agency to which they all subscribe, which did not get around to following up the *Eye*'s story until 2 June.

"Same time next week, Medusa?"

THERE has been plenty of smug British coverage of the *New York Times*'s mea culpa for Judith Miller's reporting on Iraqi WMDs, and much tut-tutting over her reliance on information from Ahmed Chalabi. But no one has seen fit to mention that Miller had another source who also plied her with stories about Saddam's threat to civilisation – the late Dr David Kelly.

Kelly's last-ever email – the one referring to "many dark actors playing games" – was sent to Judith Miller. "Thanks for your support," he wrote. "I appreciate your friendship at this time." This was in reply to a message in which Miller described herself as a "member of your fan club".

The fandom/friendship appears to have gone back several years. Kelly was one of the main sources for *Germs: The Ultimate Weapon*, a 2001 book co-authored by Miller and two of her *New York Times* colleagues. He is depicted as something of a hero, who after the first Gulf War opened the west's eyes to the continuing threat allegedly posed by Iraq.

Miller continued to use Kelly as a source in the run-up to the Iraq war, including in her notorious article "CIA hunts Iraq tie to Soviet smallpox", published in the *NYT* on 3 December 2002. "The CIA," Miller revealed, "is investigating an informant's accusation that Iraq obtained a particularly virulent strain of smallpox from a Russian scientist who worked in a smallpox lab in Moscow during Soviet times." The piece has since been slated for its "prolific blind sourcing" – but one of the few named sources in the article was Kelly.

He is still idolised by many right-on hacks – including John Pilger, who reckons the "heroic" Kelly was "the antithesis of those [in government], who have shown themselves to be the agents of a dangerous, rampant foreign power". Could this be why, although it's now open season on Ahmed Chalabi, there is a strange silence about the role of David Kelly in the lurid stories written by Miller and others?

THERE is nothing worse than throwing a party that no one turns up to and the *Sun*'s Richard Littlejohn is feeling miffed.

"Next year anyone from Eastern Europe who wants to come here will get the red carpet treatment," he ranted in September. "The home office seems to take a perverse delight in letting in those who have no connection with Britain, no claim to be here, who don't speak English and have no intention of supporting themselves."

On 4 May, several days after the doors opened, he was still expecting plenty of guests. "David Blunkett insists only 13,000 immigrants will come to Britain from the new EU states in eastern Europe. Does he still believe his own figures, given that 1,000 arrived at Victoria coach station on the first day alone?"

Last week, however, Littlejohn appeared to have finally given up hope and tucked in to the cake by himself. "Whatever happened to the flood of eastern European immigrants who were coming here after May 1?" he wistfully mused. "They took one look at the place and went home again. Can anyone blame them?"

CARTER-FUCKWATCH

Fee Speech

IN *Eye* 1104 we reported that the greedy solicitors at Peter Carter-Fuck and Partners were facing the "appalling prospect" that appeal court judges might derail their Pullman-style gravy train. And so it has come to pass.

Two weeks ago the court handed down a devastating judgment on Carter-Fuck's use of a contingency fee arrangement (CFA) to represent one Adam Musa King in a libel suit against the *Sunday Telegraph*.

CFAs are often called "no win, no fee". But the corollary is that if the plaintiff *does* win, his solicitors may add to their normal charges a 100 percent success fee (charmingly known as an "uplift"), thus doubling the bill the loser has to pay. In the case of Carter-Fuck and Partners, whose fees are colossal even without an uplift, this can make the cost of defending one of their actions utterly prohibitive – and utterly disproportionate to any damages awarded.

Last summer Mr Justice Eady rejected the *Sunday Telegraph*'s application to have the Musa King case struck out as an abuse of process. The paper appealed to lords justice Brooke, Parker and Kay. Although they agreed that the libel action could go ahead, they ruled that in future there should be a cap on the costs a defendant has to pay. (Following this judgment, it now seems the case will be settled out of court after all.)

Brooke did not suggest what that limit might be. "It will be sufficient only to say," he explained, "that the claimants' lawyers [Carter-Fuck] appear to have advanced their client's claim from time to time in a manner that is wholly incompatible with the philosophy of the Civil Procedure Rules, and that I would expect a costs judge to take an axe to certain elements of their charges if the matter ever proceeds to an assessment." He added that the judge in the libel trial should also give his views, for the benefit of the costs judge, on which elements of the costs "have been wastefully or extravagantly incurred".

Brooke's own opinion of Carter-Fuck's extravagance was unequivocal. He noted that more than 10 months after the *Sunday Telegraph* article about Musa King, the solicitors had suddenly sent the paper ("out of the blue") a long letter complaining about "dreadful libels", "baseless smears" and "wicked malice". As Brooke observed, in the face of such a letter "the prospects of early settlement of the claim must have appeared to any objective observer slim almost to vanishing point". Yet because the Carter-Fuck lawyers were "running their client's case in such an extravagant manner", they had already clocked up a bill of £32,000 just for the original exchange of letters. So the *Telegraph* faced a likely bill for Musa King's costs of more than £60,000 (allowing for a 100 percent "uplift") even if it attempted to settle at the first possible opportunity in January 2003.

But of course the boys at Carter-Fuck had no wish to settle when they could earn far more by provoking a full-scale court battle. As Brooke said of their letter before action: "Its late arrival gave the defendants no chance to consider their position before the proceedings were started six days later, and its vituperative tone appeared calculated to raise the temperature and to inflate the parties' legal costs in a manner that entirely conflicts with the philosophy underlying the civil justice reforms."

A further letter on 28 April 2003, equally aggressive and verbose, ran to no fewer than 10 pages thanks to copious use of *Roget's Thesaurus*. (In a typical passage, it described the *Sunday Telegraph*'s attitude as "by turns evasive, equivocal, confused and confusing".) And no wonder: the court heard that the cost of writing this letter, with "uplift", would be charged by Carter-Fuck at *£750 an hour*, not including counsel's fees.

In his judgment, to which both other judges concurred, Brooke expressed dismay at "the gulf between the value of this action to the claimant and its value to the lawyers instructed in the case". Even if Musa King won, both sides agreed that his damages would be under £150,000, yet the *Telegraph* would be landed with a costs bill – including Carter-Fuck's success fee – of well over £1m.

"Something," Brooke commented, "seems to have gone seriously wrong." And that something is the attitude of Carter-Fuck and Partners, for whom contingency-fee libel cases provide no less than 30 percent of their income. When asked recently by the *Guardian* if it was fair that defendants had to pay huge extra "winnings" to the lawyers, Carter-Fuck partner Barton Taylor replied cheerfully: "Life's not fair really, is it?"

But it may be getting slightly fairer. Two months ago a judge rejected the extravagant fees demanded in a CFA-funded case brought on behalf of a taxi-driver against the *Sun*: Carter-Fuck had submitted a bill for £92,000, which the costs judge reduced to just £33,000. Now, horror of horrors, the appeal court is recommending cost-capping.

As Brooke concluded, everyone accepts that the loser in a libel action should pay the winner's "reasonable and proportionate" costs. "What is at issue in this case, however, is the appropriateness of arrangements whereby a defendant publisher will be required to pay up to twice the reasonable and proportionate costs of the claimant… The obvious unfairness of such a system is bound to have a chilling effect on a newspaper exercising its right to freedom of expression."

In short, Carter-Fuck's boundless avarice is not only an affront to justice, but also a menace to freedom of speech. And it's official.

WORLD OF MAGAZINES

IF EVER two magazines were destined to come to blows it was the new men's weeklies, *Zoo* and *Nuts*.

This very nearly came to pass at the recent UKTV Comedy Quiz, where the organisers rather foolishly put teams from both publications on tables next to each other. Needless to say the alcohol flowed freely and soon the barracking began – led by *Nuts*' Pete Cashmore, a *Loaded* veteran who was so popular there that the editor repeatedly sent him on feature assignments like: "What it feels like to have fireworks fired at you."

As the contest progressed, to the horror of more august publications like the *Guardian*'s Guide and the *Sunday Times*'s Culture, two things became apparent. The first was that both lads' rags were doing rather well, and the second was that both were getting very drunk. Cashmore, meanwhile, was fanning the flames with comments such as "send us your CVs when your mag closes down" and the even more considered *apercu*, "you're a bunch of cunts."

Things came to a head when, to their rivals' annoyance, the *Zoo* team claimed first prize. By now Cashmore was embarrassing even his own team-mates, and most of the other competitors couldn't remember which mag they worked for. When Cashmore opined to one of the female Zoo-ettes that "I'd shag everyone in this room before I'd shag you", Zoo's editor-at-large Michael Hogan, surfing on a wave of booze-addled chivalry, finally saw red.

He windmilled through several plates of canapés and parted a red sea of velveteen seat-backs to defend the maiden. Luckily, Hogan's run was spotted by his own team-mates who intercepted him and hauled him away. With *Nuts* still claiming to be the market-leader but *Zoo* having outsold its rival in recent weeks, what price a conciliatory dinner after the first raft of ABCs in August?

IN THE TEAROOM

IF Oliver Letwin's as smart as his CV attests, how come he's prone to so many gaffes?

One day the shadow chancellor's reported to have told a think tank that he'd really like to decimate the public services to bring public spending down to a mere third of GDP and that his avowed target of 40 percent is just "tactical". Next he's accused of predicting that the NHS wouldn't survive five years of Tory stewardship.

Even if the shadow chancellor were the victim of some selective misquotation (which he was, on both counts), it still doesn't look too good, does it? The idea of Letwin as the impractical boffin is an easy one to sell.

In fact the shadow chancellor is quite happy to be both misunderstood and underestimated at the moment. Like his boss, Michael Howard, Letwin is engaged in a personal repositioning exercise at the moment. Howard, one of nature's right-wingers, is keen to slough off a reputation for being a Tory headbanger and appear so sweetly reasonable that floating voters might stomach the idea of having him as PM. And events are making Labour taunts of extremism less and less credible every week. Without shifting his views on the EU one centimetre... er... or an inch even towards the centre ground, just having UKIP looming stage-right has made Howard look like a moderate on Europe.

Letwin is headed the other way. The headbanger tendency, which accounts for most of what's left of the Conservative party's active paid-up membership, has long regarded the shadow chancellor as a bit of a pinko, perhaps even a closet-Bolshevist. Even when he explains that four voters in ten are in some way employed by the state, they can't understand his reluctance to commit to giving large numbers of them the sack the minute the Tories get in.

By contrast, among the opinion formers in the media and the political class generally, Letwin is seen as ever such a sensible, mainstream guy. So much so, their adulation is becoming a serious liability. Could these recent so-called gaffes just be Letwin's way of protecting his back by sending a few signals that once in office he could be a much harder bastard than he looks? Now, that really would be clever.

'Quintus Slide'

JOINED-UP GOVERNMENT

"The notion still put about by mischievous and irresponsible parties that Crossrail was ever part of the Olympic bid is nonsense, and it always was."

— Transport minister Tony McNulty, parliamentary debate, 25 May.

"One of the reasons why I think we can be cautiously optimistic, if I can put it like that, about the Olympic bid is that we knew perfectly well what the main point of criticism would be. It's on the transport infrastructure. We're now putting substantial investment into the Underground, we are committed to Crossrail and the other major London projects, and we have got to set out in the months to come how we are going to fund those, and implement them effectively... I'm reasonably hopeful we will do that."

— Tony Blair, official press conference, 25 May

THE Dear Leader is fond of strutting the world stage (his favourite stop-over being the White House Rose Garden where he can be photographed with Dubya). But foreign office mandarins are unhappy at some of the brush-offs given to other world leaders who aren't deemed important enough to warrant an audience with Mr Tony.

As Spanish Socialist leader, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero tried and failed to get a meeting with Blair. He only managed to get into 10 Downing Street after he had defeated Blair's chum, Jose Maria Aznar, and become the new prime minister of Spain. Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, apparently a key ally in the global fight against terrorism, has twice tried and failed to get an audience with his holiness, while a fortnight ago his real holiness, the Dalai Lama, had to make do with Jack Straw.

AS the silly season approaches, so too do biennial elections for Labour's largely toothless national executive committee (NEC).

The elections used to be held in time for the autumn party conference, but the now ennobled former party general secretary Margaret McDonagh put paid to that. Alarmed by the media attention given to Old Labour's smelly sock brigade, she banished the election to late summer. "New" Labour now announces the results of its beauty pageant for ugly people on a good day for burying bad news.

This time around a flurry of excitement has been stirred by the clumsy intervention of Alex Balardinelli, current chair of the grandly titled "Young Labour National Committee". The spotty youth has just broken all the rules by sending an email to his cronies urging a vote for the Blairite candidates. "You have SIX votes," writes Alex. "I was hoping you might use one of them for Mandy Telford. Mandy is currently the Labour President of the National Union of Students and has worked tirelessly for the party over the past ten years. You can read her website..." blah, blah.

In similar vein Alex warbles on about his other preferred candidates. "Would you also ask your friends and colleagues in the party to support them too?" So will young Alex be up before the "new" Labour beak, in the shape of Labour's general-secretary Matt Carter for infringing the rules as an officer. Is that a pig flying past the window?

"Wow, it must be such an exciting job – being a teacher"

THE sudden death of Jim Marshall, Old Labour MP for Leicester South, is likely to give Tony Blair a headache.

On paper the seat is as safe as houses. But with a large ethnic minority electorate still fuming over the Iraq war, the by-election, probably to be held this autumn, could be a repeat of the Brent East fiasco where Labour was trounced by the Lib Dems. What to do?

Earlier this year Labour party chiefs hatched a plan to water down all-wimmin shortlists in some seats to smooth the way for assorted government special advisers. Leicester South would in usual circumstances have been an ideal constituency to parachute someone into. But to do this now would guarantee an even more miserable time for the PM. So the search is on for a prominent, Labour-supporting, anti-war Moslem candidate. It could take a while.

THE £10,000 donation from William Bollinger to the Labour party revealed in the latest electoral commission register, shows the kind of rich people who are attracted to Tony Blair.

Bollinger set up and now runs a hedge fund called Egerton Capital with partner John Armitage. The firm gambles on the stock market and, like all hedge funds, can make as much money from corporate failure as business success.

Though the firm can be found in London's Shoe Lane, many of the funds it controls are registered offshore. Chancellor Gordon Brown can make the occasional noise about tax avoidance, but Labour is still happy to take cash from wheeler-dealers who keep some of their piles of cash safe from the tax man by registering them in exotic, faraway islands.

WILL the government follow the advice of the Commons health select committee and crack down on the junk food industry and advertising? Don't bank on it.

These days Labour party conferences look like tuck shops, with meetings and stalls sponsored variously by McDonald's, Nestlé or Cadbury's. It's hard to imagine the party biting the hand that feeds it and the public so much sugar, salt and saturated fat.

The sugary drinks lobby even has a route to the top now that Tony Blair's former guru Peter Mandelson is a director of advertising agency Clemmow Hornby Inge. One of its better known slogans is: "You know when you've been Tangoed."

Though the debate on obesity has so far focused on the food-and-drink industry, the road lobby's insidious role in creating an inactive nation dependent on the car shouldn't be ignored.

Sprawling housing developments and enterprise parks, along with out-of-town shopping, make car travel more convenient than other transport. In urban centres, road "improvements" may ease traffic flow but they make walking slower and cycling more hazardous.

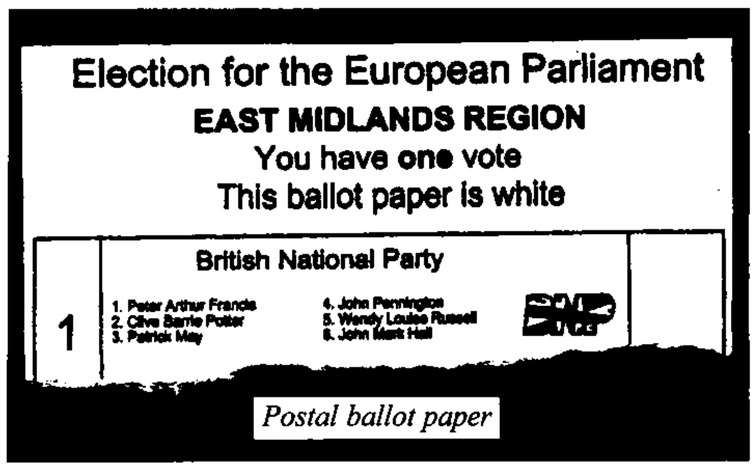
In 1997 "new" Labour promised policies that would lead to less car use and more journeys on foot and bike. The road lobby wasn't keen and the policies were dropped and the buck passed to local councils (*Eyes passim*). Thus "exercise" in modern Britain often has to be paid for at "health" centres and gyms, kids can't play in streets that have been taken over by cars and cycling on ordinary roads can seem suicidal. Labour boasts that cash from the sale of playing fields has been spent on leisure centres. But this still leaves the treasury and road lobby quids in as the motivated minority burn yet more oil driving to the gym to pay to use, er, walking machines.

JOHN TOKER, the new head of "news" at the Home Office, appears to be a graduate of the Alastair Campbell-Jo Moore school of charm and influence.

Irked by the endless press coverage about Maxine Carr and the temporary loss of papers which revealed her release plans, Toker sought to stifle the debate.

But when Harry Fletcher, assistant general-secretary of NAPO, the probation union, declined Toker's personal request not to give any more TV interviews about the case, Toker resorted to threats. As Fletcher made his way to *Newsnight* for another interview, Toker promised that he would "damage" Fletcher's reputation.

This was all very curious because Fletcher has consistently criticised the media's demonisation of Ian Huntley's girlfriend while supporting the Home Office decision to release her. Joker declined to comment.



Postal ballot paper

HOW mean can home secretary David Blunkett get? He has just tabled regulations that will abolish the £50 payment asylum seekers can apply for every six months to help them with hardship.

The payment was introduced in 1999 as a sop by then home secretary Jack Straw to Labour backbenchers who were concerned about the low level of benefits available to asylum seekers, compared to those on mainstream benefits.

Why he's axed the payment, introduced so that asylum seekers might "replace worn out shoes or clothes and other essentials", is a mystery.

IS Plaid Cymru a political party... or a motor racing team?

Another Plaid Cymru MP was in the dock for speeding this month: Elfyn Llwyd, who admitted to his fourth speeding offence to Pwllheli magistrates, bringing him to 12 points on his licence and a possible ban.

However, the court decided a ban would be unfair on constituents in his huge rural constituency and instead they fined him £350. Mr Llwyd therefore follows in the tyre tracks of party president Dafydd Iwan who similarly escaped a ban last October (*Eye* 1092) on the grounds that it would unduly affect his political life.

THE government's much hyped drugs awareness campaign, "Talk to Frank", is, frankly, nonsense.

According to drug experts, the website which aims to give teenagers, parents and carers information and advice is littered with errors – some of which could put users at risk.

For example, on GHB (gamma hydroxybutyrate), which was developed as an anaesthetic, it says: "A teaspoon or capful is a normal dose... a small capful has a euphoric effect that makes users feel happy, sensual and uninhibited". Except GHB can be dissolved in very little water, so with some mixes a teaspoon could be an overdose.

On 2CBs and 2C-T-7, often sold as ecstasy but with a more hallucinogenic effect, it says: "Sold as white powder or tiny 5mg pills. Most people take several at a time and effects can last from 4 to 8 hours." Except as drug workers warn, the strengths of the pill can be very different and taking multiple pills of unknown quantity is extremely risky. Nowhere does the site give advice about options to test what is in a pill.

On its one-arm bandit "game" about mixing drugs, it suggests under the combination of mixing cocaine with alcohol, "some people set themselves the rule of only one alcoholic drink per line".

Often the information is simply meaningless. On mixing cocaine and LSD it states: "No point at all." A more informative reply might point out that stimulating the central nervous system with cocaine might not be a clever thing to do when taking an hallucinogen.

The list of mistakes and misleading advice supplied to the *Eye*, and confirmed by other experts, is lengthy. Shame the government didn't give the £3m to those drug workers and agencies who know what they are doing.

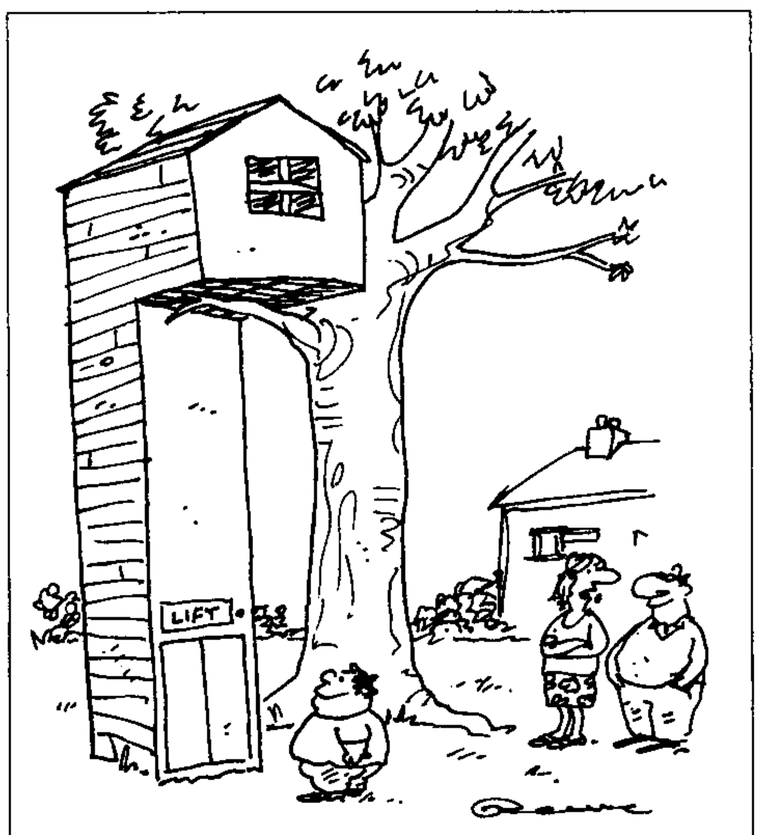
WITH the nation still in the dark (ho ho) about the cause of the black-outs which affected 250,000 people last August, Ofgem (the office of gas and electricity management), still maintains the report of the official inquiry will be published "sooner rather than later".

It has been saying this for months. And now a new element has arisen in the guessing game about what is holding it up. Step forward, the National Grid.

The Grid, which will loom large in the inquest, has announced that it is seeking to raise £5bn by selling off its local gas networks. The gas networks are separate from the electricity cables and the shutdown which stopped mainline trains, trapped people in lifts and tube tunnels and blacked out traffic lights, homes and businesses. However, as they both come from the same company, anyone thinking of buying up bits of Grid would not want to be liable for extra expenditure to strengthen the system after buying it.

Ofgem denies this is a factor in the interminable delay in publishing the black-out report. That is very comforting, because otherwise cynics might suspect that the government-appointed Ofgem and the privately-owned Grid were colluding to delay publication and so keep up the selling price. Such action would be most improper and the government couldn't countenance it. Or could it?

'Backbiter'



"You spoil that boy"

POLICE 5

WITH just 400 skilled officers and civilian staff capable of dealing with high-level cyber crime, Britain's police have run up a 12-month backlog in investigations.

A report by the think-tank IPPR and e-commerce lobby group EURIM found that during the lengthy Operation Ore paedophile hunt, more than half the 400 experts were concentrated on one investigation. Only a major emergency – like the anti-terrorist Operation Crevice in March this year – was allowed to divert their attention, leaving most cyber-crime ignored.

The 400 people include staff of the National Crime Squad, the Forensic Science Service and its direct contractors. "Computer assisted extortion, fraud and impersonation, however great the damage, are on the back burner," says the report, which calls for the rapid training of more experts.

With an estimated 8,000 private IT security "experts" rubbing their hands at the thought of all that work, the e-commerce sector fears that protection of the industry will soon be farmed out to save police time. "We face a very real risk of seeing the democratically accountable policing of computer-assisted crime replaced by a combination of vigilante action and the covert privatisation of legitimate investigation," says the report.

Indeed. And first out of the starting blocks is the *Eye*'s old friend, QinetiQ, whose director Neil Fisher is already telling the IT press: "Only by using qualified experts from private sector organisations both in training police forces and actually conducting parts of the digital investigation, can this battle against the e-criminal be won."

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

THE European commission is stretching its already impressive reputation for delay in its disciplining of Marta Andreasen, the accounting officer who complained that the EU's accounting standards were rotten.

The commission accuses her of breaching staff regulations which forbid "any unauthorised disclosure of information received in the line of duty". However, it took from mid-2002 until this year for a disciplinary board to meet to hear the case. Could the sloth be a deliberate attempt to prevent red faces among present commissioners? Perish the thought.

Nevertheless the board, which has met twice and should send its recommendation to the "college" of commissioners within two months, is now debating whether to sit for a third time. When its recommendation is finally sent to the office of Neil Kinnock, commissioner in charge of administrative reform, the commission then has another two months to come to its own conclusion. But as Kinnock's spokesman Eric Mamer says, timing isn't binding.

No one should be too surprised if the results don't emerge until late August when Europe's asleep on the beach – or even nearer to the final closure of the present commission in October.

EUROPEAN commissioner Neil Kinnock caused a flurry in the European parliament recently when he told Danish Eurosceptic leader Jens-Peter Bonde exactly what he thought of him.

According to Bonde, who had just rallied 150 MEPs to vote against the European Commission, Kinnock made his anger very plain by announcing "that I was now his lifetime enemy. He wanted me to know that he never forgot about an enemy. He would make sure that I would be punished before the 1st November." Watch this space... and Bonde's back.

STRANGE rumours surface concerning UKIP's European election candidate in the East Midlands, "celebrity" sun tan, Robert Kilroy-Silk.

The whisper from the UKIP election campaign team is that Kilroy is planning only a short trip to Brussels should he win. Indeed, it's been suggested that if he's elected, he'll do a "Sonia Gandhi".

Sad though this would be, UKIP would still have benefited from all the thousands of column inches (and votes) the candidature of a B list celeb has garnered.

WHATEVER the results of the European poll, will anything change?

As *International Freight Weekly* magazine recorded last month: "We were somehow unsurprised to note that EU newcomers Malta and Cyprus have won a place on the board of the new European Rail Agency – despite the fact that they haven't a metre of track between them."

OH YEAH?

"European taxpayers have to be sure that their money is correctly spent. The commission's duty is to recover funds which are mis-spent... The commission's audit procedure is a vital instrument in controlling CAP expenditure..."

— Franz Fischler, EU commissioner for agriculture.

EYE TV

EastEnders (BBC1)

ONE of the working principles of soap opera is that what goes around comes around and so there's a certain neatness in Michael Grade returning to the BBC at this point.

In 1985, Grade, as controller of BBC1, saved the corporation from a terrible ratings crisis by building the main channel's early evening schedule around a new Cockney soaper.

Now, continuing a trend for comebacks – with Leslie Grantham's Dirty Den back on Albert Square despite his apparent death some years ago – Gradey returns to find his old friend shaping up to mug him.

Last month, a shooting storyline in *Emmerdale*, a soap always considered a joke in comparison with the big two of *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders*, pushed the BBC1 series down to seven million, its lowest ratings performance for 13 years.

At the same time, Leslie Grantham is serving out a two-month suspension for being persuaded by a *News Of The World* stooge to wank into a web-cam and slag off most of the other main actors in the show. The "bad girl" antics of Jessie Wallace, who plays Cat Slater, are also regularly in the papers and Grade and the BBC governors are investigating whether the programme broke watershed rules in its handling of the rape of the character "Little Mo".

Off-screen scandal and bureacreatic tangles need not harm a series on-screen – in fact, they can help to build a buzz around it – but *EastEnders* currently faces the destabilising combination of production troubles and deserting viewers.

So what has gone wrong? Friday night's edition offered a few clues. The big storyline was preparations for Martin and Sonia's wedding, counterpointed with the fall-out from the abandoned wedding of Nana Moon and the latest Albert Square con-man, Wilfred Atkins, who has scarpered, also taking £30,000 of Fat Pat's life-savings.

This précis establishes the first problem: familiarity of incident. Even the BBC1 continuity announcer on Friday night, who's supposed to make you want to watch the stuff, said with some weariness: "Another day, another wedding plan." In its 19 years on-screen, *EastEnders* has already hosted more weddings than Gretna Green. So it's hard to get very worked up over Martin and Sonia's march up the aisle.

Especially when the main business of the script is a fight between the two Fowler clan matriarchs – Pauline and Dot Cotton – over who should have a say over the bash. Pauline wants the wedding breakfast to be vegetarian kebabs, chicken satay and salmon roulade; Dot thinks there's nothing better than a nice egg sarnie. Pauline wants the order of service to include a gruesome little verse of her own composition; Dot insists on psalms alone.

This parody of Old Cockney and New Cockney has been played out for almost two decades between these characters and the scriptwriters have nowhere new to go with it. Even more dangerously, the acting has begun to reflect the repetitions. June Brown, a fine old actress, now rattles through her dialogue as if she's just marking it in a lighting rehearsal, understandably unable to summon up energy for lines which are either ploddingly expositional – "Where you going? Because the wedding rehearsal ain't until this afternoon" – or which she must have said already a thousand times: "I might have one of me turns."

The other major problem is that a succession of ratings wars require the characters and the location to endure so much that they cease to have any reality at all. Worryingly for *EastEnders*, this is what finished off *Brookside* after 20 years when Ron Dixon, a minor Scouse shop-keeper, had endured so many sieges, bereavements, jail terms and near-death experiences that he would have stuck out in a script by *Euripides*, let alone a TV soap.

It's the same now in Albert Square, where folk like Pauline and Pat carry around their dramatic past storylines like clanking leg-irons. Unwisely, the scriptwriters occasionally fill in some of the back-story – as when Pat summarises some late 90s episodes to a copper investigating the Atkins con, with the line "Everyone I love has either died or gone" – but this has the distracting effect of reminding us how much these people have previously been put through in order to see off *Coronation Street*.

Realism is also threatened by the fact that Leslie Grantham, in his final appearances recorded before his suspension, has lines which, either deliberately or accidentally, seem to comment on his tabloid scandals. "I know we haven't been best of mates recently," he tells Pat, who snaps back about "some cocky git giving me grief".

Is it becoming possible that Grade, who was the BBC midwife to *EastEnders*, may also be around for its funeral?

'Remote Controller'

DR SPOONER REVISITED

"My next restaurant's going to be the Friar Tuck"

DUMB BRITAIN

The Vault, ITV

Melanie Sykes: Who recently celebrated their 25th anniversary of becoming prime minister of Great Britain?

Contestant: Tony Blair.

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: Which allied leader met with Stalin and Roosevelt at Yalta in 1945?

Contestant: Hitler.

Steve Wright's Big Quiz, Radio 2

Steve Wright: Who wrote the music for *Moon River* and also *The Pink Panther*?

Contestant: Mendelssohn.

Den Siergertsz Show, BBC Radio Stoke

Den Siergertsz: An isosceles triangle has how many sides of equal length? It's not three or four. How many?

Contestant: Hang on, I'm just working it out. (*Pause.*) Eight.

One of the pieces believed to have been destroyed was her tent titled, *Everyone I Ever Slept With, From 1963 To 1995.* Emin said yesterday that she could not remake the work. "The tent's a seminal thing," she said.

Daily Telegraph

MEDIA NEWS

THE BBC has produced another propaganda aid for employees confronted with difficult, post-Hutton questions about the corporation.

Called "Speakers Corner", it provides "the tools to be an effective ambassador for the BBC" whether "addressing a conference" or "a discussion with family and friends".

Anxious staff can access an "interactive story wheel" packed with reassuring statistics: "We can name 120 programmes from 2002 of which we, and the nation, can be proud," it says, offering some examples – *Fawlty Towers* (not exactly a recent production), *Life of Mammals*, *Top Of The Pops* and, er, that's it.

PRODUCERS of the BBC's *Songs of Praise* are under strict orders to avoid confronting their dwindling band of viewers with anything likely to cause offence in a multi-faith world.

This means that an item about, say, God, becomes immensely controversial. Hence the preference for items about other matters such as gardening, Bracknell or even, during Pentecost, the weather: "Surely one of our greatest mysteries".

O . B . N .

"Dear Mark, Inspire our creativity and be a fighter" – Ariel *headline about the BBC's new DG*

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Suburbia's the new rock'n'roll." — Diarmuid Gavin, *Gardeners' Question Time*.

"Authors really are the new rock'n'roll." — Amanda Ross, producer of Richard and Judy, *Observer*.

"Allotments really are the new rock'n'roll." — *Western Mail*.

"Chicken-keeping is the new rock'n'roll." — *Northern Echo*.

"It's official. Cooking is the new rock'n'roll." — *Daily Record*.

"Art is the new rock'n'roll." — *Toronto Star*.

"Folk music, it seems, is the new rock'n'roll." — *The Times*.

"Nice, it seems, is the new rock'n'roll." — *Guardian*.

"Normality is the new rock'n'roll." — *Irish Independent*.

"Fine Gael is the new rock'n'roll." — *Sunday Tribune* (Dublin).

"Going to the gym is the new rock'n'roll." — London *Evening Standard*.

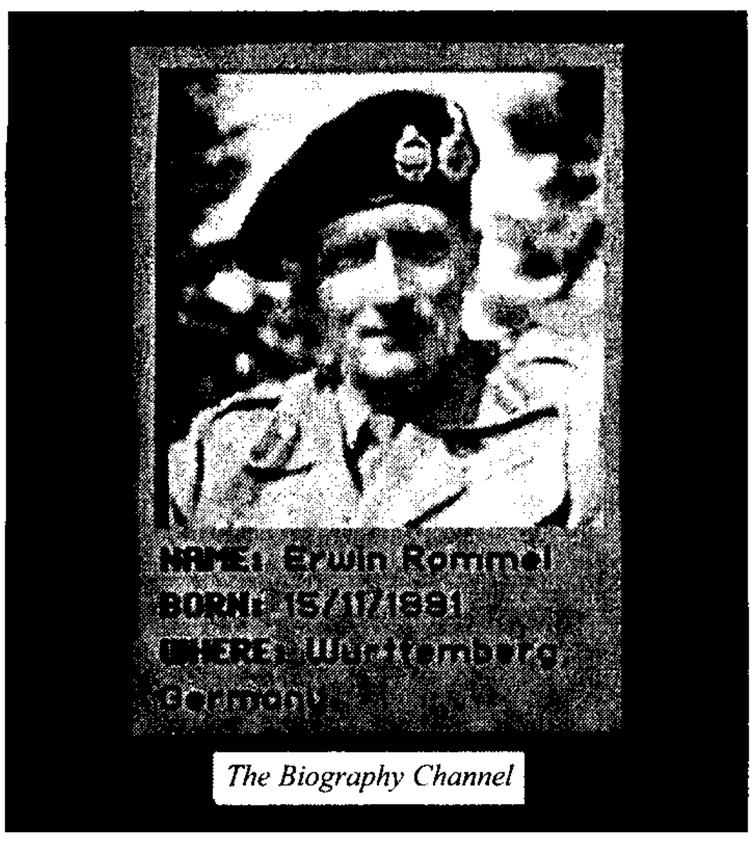
"To call Buddhism the new rock'n'roll might be insensitive, but..." — Glasgow *Evening Times*.

PLUGGED IN

***THE Day After Tomorrow*, the latest FX-heavy disaster-fest from 20th Century Fox (prop. R Murdoch) is filled with plugs for Fox News (prop. R Murdoch) and Sky News (prop. R Murdoch), which appear to be the only two TV channels to survive the coming of a second ice age.**

But the cross-promotions go both ways, as readers of the *Sun* (prop. R Murdoch) and *Times* (prop. R Murdoch) found out in the run-up to the film's release. "It's Disaster Week in the *Sun* to celebrate the release of £70m mega-movie *The Day After Tomorrow*!" announced hack Tim Spanton on 24 May, stringing together three days of breathless doom-mongering which managed rather tastelessly to link the *Poseidon Adventure* ("voted best disaster movie ever by film fans") with real-life testimonies from survivors of the Piper Alpha and Herald of Free Enterprise tragedies.

The paper even squeezed "news" stories out of arrangements for the film's premiere ("it's so cool it's sub zero – movie execs plan to make it snow outside the cinema") and the attendance of their very own page 3 girl Nicola T ("her warm front defrosted a few hearts"). The award for most impressive shoe-horning of a plug, however, goes to the *Times*, whose "Body and Soul" column ("talking about the weather is a shared experience and so creates bonds between us") was pipped to the post by the achievement of Anne Ashworth, its personal finance editor, in comparing doom-mongering about possible interest rate rises with "the June blockbuster which tells the story of the overnight arrival of a new ice age".



EYE TOLD YOU SO AD NAUSEAM

"The Advertising Standards Authority, the supposed regulatory body for print advertising, has proved itself utterly ineffectual." — *Private Eye*, 4 July 2000.

"The various adjudications by the witless and impotent ASA on the whole affair make for much amusement." — *Private Eye*, 11 April 2000.

"[The ASA] is renowned for its trenchant critiques of all manner of misleading claims, but also renowned for its single powerlessness to do anything about them." — *Private Eye*, 27 Feb 2002.

"Everyone knew [these campaigns] would attract objections and the ASA was powerless to do anything about it. We have been here before." — *Private Eye*, 21 May 2003.

Regulation of all advertising in Britain will be handed to the ASA. – Ofcom announcement, 17 May 2004.

"We were disturbed at the ineffectiveness of the Advertising Standards Authority. We recommend that Ofcom be asked to review the role of the ASA with a view to improving its effectiveness." — Commons health committee report, 27 May 2004.

WHILE misleading reader offers in newspapers regularly come to the attention of the Advertising Standards Authority – Express Newspapers, Associated and News International have all had a dozen or more complaints against them upheld by the watchdog in the past five years – few have been more blatant than that attempted by the *Daily Sport* recently.

In March the ASA received a number of complaints from readers who had picked up a copy of the paper after seeing the legend "DAILY SPORT 10p TODAY" emblazoned in huge text across its front page, only to be charged 40p at the counter. As the ASA's adjudication explained: "Smallprint underneath the words 'Daily Sport' stated 'buy this newspaper today, see page 2 and get XXX Whitehouse magazine for just...'"

Unsurprisingly the watchdog upheld the complaints and told the publishers of the filth-for-all-the-family funsheet to "seek advice" from the ASA before running similar promotions in the future – a ruling the rag ignored, using the same promotion again at the end of last month.

The *Sport* – which has in the past got into trouble for carrying adverts for "a great sporting Uzi machine gun" – has now been referred to the office of fair trading (OFT) which, unlike the pisspoor ASA, can actually take legal action against those who break its rules.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Child, 3, dies from being too fat — the terrifying truth behind Britain's obesity epidemic."

— Front page, *Daily Express*, 27 May

"Diet of junk food and lazy lifestyles killing 52,500 Britons EVERY year."

— Page 10, *Daily Express*, 27 May

"Free doughnut and coffee for every reader... the Daily Express is offering every reader a Krispy Kreme original glazed doughnut and regular coffee absolutely FREE."

— Page 61, *Daily Express*, 27 May

THERE seems to be no escape for kids from fast food advertising – not even in hospital.

Even more bizarrely, Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital (NNUH) is even defending its decision to allow local McDonald's staff on to the children's ward once a week where, to the horror of many parents, they hand out toys, balloons and meal vouchers.

A hospital spokeswoman said the visits were part of the hospital's efforts to provide relief and entertainment on the ward, adding that it was up to parents and children whether to accept the freebies. "If this has offended anyone, we can only apologise; but it has been done in the interests of making life for those sick children stuck in hospital a little more bearable," she said.

The hospital has now asked McDonald's not to hand out any more vouchers. However, NNUH is not alone: the burger giant apparently runs the same visiting scheme in kids' wards all over the country and the department of health is doing nothing to stop it.

CHURCH NEWS

THOUGH Jesus himself had little to say on the subject, homosexuality is something of an obsession for Forward in Faith, a pressure group of conservative evangelicals and Catholics in the Church of England. No surprise, then, that its newsletter *New Directions* returns to this fascinating subject so often.

However, at least one reader was surprised to see a recent item describing the Archbishop of Armagh, Dr Robin Eames – who is chairing an Anglican commission on sexuality – as the church's "fudge-packer-in-chief". He sent a complaint to the editor.

In his reply, Robbie Low of *New Directions* says that everyone in the office read the letter "with incredulity and astonishment as no one there was aware that such an apparently innocuous term should have an offensive meaning... There could be no implication that Archbishop Eames is homosexual, open or closet". The word "fudge", he explains, "was used in the dictionary sense of 'patching up' an agreement".

Yeah, of course. Still, if that really is what *New Directions* meant, will it now print a clarification? Apparently not. "The editor is grateful for your letter," Low writes, "but in a world in which words and their meaning are almost daily sullied and subverted by those with filthy minds we must assume that our readers share, with us, a traditional understanding of the English language."

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

SIGNAL FAILURES

Angry from Tunbridge Wells

IF THE government still needs convincing that the "strategic" rail authority (SRA) should be scaled down in the summer's industry review, it need only study the SRA's plan for Kent's commuter services.

SRA bureaucrats have devised a new service pattern that looks tidier on maps and timetables. Some stations will have trains to Charing Cross or Cannon Street but not both, as now. And many services will be reduced when faster alternatives to London begin over the Channel tunnel rail link (CTRL), supposedly in 2007, and the trains should be more reliable. "We hope that consultees will respond positively to us," said SRA chief Richard Bowker.

There's only one drawback: passengers. "The SRA seems to feel it has a divine right to dictate to passengers where they should travel to," fumes the Tonbridge commuters' association. "We have been truly astonished at the incompetence and arrogance demonstrated by the SRA."

Commuters have settled near stations in Kent where trains go direct to the London station nearest their workplace. Timetables have evolved over decades to reflect social changes and minimise overcrowding and delays, given the inadequate resources available. But Bowker wants to sweep away that evolution.

The SRA is still wedded to the eccentric British notion that train services can somehow be made more reliable without upgrading infrastructure and simply by tinkering with timetables. The critical tracks west of London Bridge have needed expansion for decades but the Thameslink 2000 scheme, which would alleviate the pressure, is delayed to 2012 or later. The official watchdog fears the already crowded London Bridge station (where no significant upgrade is proposed) could be a safety risk when commuters offered only Charing Cross trains cross the tracks for Cannon Street trains.

The SRA doesn't focus on such awkward details but on premium-fare CTRL fast services instead. It predicts many commuters will abandon established services for CTRL, some driving to the giant Ebbsfleet car-park complex-cum-train station. But most Kent commuters don't work around St Pancras, where CTRL terminates, so time saved on CTRL will be lost battling through London.

Taxpayers are contributing £5bn to CTRL's construction so trains can speed to France (*Eye* 1088); but with Eurostar business way short of predictions something else has to use the new tracks or they'll be a political and financial embarrassment. Demand for CTRL commuter trains will build gradually, as employment and residential patterns grow around them. But forcing commuters on to them prematurely as the SRA cuts would do, threatens chaos at St Pancras where Thameslink 2000 is needed to handle increased arrivals.

Bids for the Kent franchise, due to begin in early 2005, must be evaluated this year and bidders must be briefed on the long-term timetables before they can bid. Why the hurry to seal the fate of thousands of commuters? Surely it's not to avoid Kent's current public-sector trains embarrassingly outshining private franchises (*Eye* 1104).

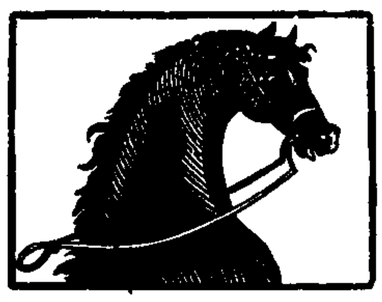
THE new franchise for the east-coast mainline (King's Cross to Edinburgh) is also being rushed through. A consultation document on it is marked "commercially confidential" by the SRA, preventing discussions with passengers. General consultation is supposedly precluded because government departments must keep quiet when elections loom.

That doesn't explain why the document wasn't delayed a month, till after the local elections, and why the consultation is for six weeks (official guidelines say 12 "minimum").

Bowker's haste to give other firms, including his former employer Virgin, a chance to dethrone GNER contrasts with slow progress on the northern regional franchise and his failure to agree new terms (promised by March 2004) for Virgin's disastrous west-coast franchise. But suggestions in the industry that Bowker wants to conclude the deal before his power's diminished by the outcome of this summer's rail review are plain scurrilous.

'Dr B. Ching'

THE COMMUTERS
OH NO! MY TRAIN'S GOING!!
OH GOD! I'M GOING TO MISS IT...
...SO MUCH...
DUE TO ESSENTIAL ENGINEERING WORKS
THE 7.40 SERVICE WILL NOT RUN FOR THE NEXT 6 MONTHS
grizelda



DOWN ON THE FARM

THE latest farce brought to us by Defra stars Alun Michael, in his role as "minister for the horse and the quality of urban life".

Michael has decided that, by the end of this month, to comply with EU rules all owners of horses and donkeys (or "equines and asinines" as the EU calls them), must have applied for an individual "passport" for each of their animals.

Brussels has been trying to get this system in place for years but in Britain, with more than a million horses and donkeys to be registered, it proved so complex to administer it has had to be postponed several times. At last, however, thanks to the tireless officials of the "rabies and equines" division of Defra's "zootechnics section", Mr Michael's spectacular is ready to roll. By next March not to have a passport for each equine and asinine will be a criminal offence, punishable by a fine of up to £5,000.

The principle of the scheme, introduced to comply with EU directive 93/623 and commission decision 2000/68, is that each horse shall be given its own "equine life number" (donkeys likewise), accompanied by a £20 passport showing the names of its parents and grandparents and which veterinary drugs it has been given. Thoroughbred horses must also have a "silhouette" signed by a vet, at a cost of a further £80, showing its distinguishing marks.

Defra admits that the initial cost to owners may be as high as £18m, with running costs of £1-2m a year thereafter. But the first oddity of the scheme is why it was ever thought necessary.

The original purpose was to ensure that people who eat horsemeat are protected from the ill-effects of any drugs administered to the horses (and presumably donkeys) they eat. Since eating horseflesh is not particularly fashionable in Britain, and since in 1937 an act of parliament was introduced to forbid the exporting of horses to be eaten on the continent, it is hard to see how these new laws have any relevance to the UK. But when the EU issues a new directive, it insists it must apply to everyone.

So the first consequence of the new passport scheme is that, in the name of the single market, it will now become legal to export thousands of British horses each year to furnish French and Italian dinner tables. A second oddity arises in the way other countries intend to apply the law which Mr Michael is keen to enforce in Britain with such rigour.

In France and Germany only horses registered to take part in competitions need passports (although German officials have already detected the first horse passport forgery). Much the same applies in Holland and Greece. In Ireland no scheme is yet in place. And no other country has yet introduced fines for not having a passport. Yet so irrelevant to the UK is any need for this scheme that our "minister for the horse" now justifies it by bleating about how useful it will be to have a "national equine database", though he cannot explain why.

In general, it seems no one has much reason to thank Mr Michael — other than those thousands of horses which for the first time will be able to enjoy the privilege of being exported from Britain to be eaten on the continent.

'Muckspreader'

ALUN MICHAEL also has responsibility for "local environmental quality" and in this role he faces a poser: should he allow farmers to put people at the risk of poisoning or not?

Pesticide Action Network (PAN UK) and campaigners representing those who believe they have been poisoned by the noxious substances farmers spray over large parts of Britain forced the government to launch a consultation last year on two questions. Should farmers give the public information about what (and when) they are spraying; and should there be no-spray buffer zones around residential areas? An early-day motion tabled by David Drew MP, a member of the select committee on the environment, food and rural affairs, has since called for a debate on these proposals too.

Whatever the official response, Michael can always hide behind the stonewalling Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP). Presented with dossiers of the many people affected by spraying, the ACP still insists the risk assessment for "bystanders" is adequate protection. This view is based on two beliefs: that hardly any spray leaves the field (because the law says it mustn't); and that even if it does the potential dose is negligible.

The ACP ignores the personal testimony of those affected as well as the many epidemiological studies linking low-dose exposure to pesticides to a mass of serious health problems.

An insight into the mindset of these scientists, who regard any doubts about chemical use as anti-scientific, comes from the minutes of one of their meetings. After stating as usual that "the current risk assessment for bystanders provides adequate protection", they continued: "The committee has asked the PSD (Pesticides Safety Directorate) to collect some further experimental data to provide further support to this view." And that's science?

'Gumboot'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

OXFORDSHIRE BLUE

"WE'VE just been having book-keeping problems," Oxfordshire county council director for resources John Jackson told local hacks, after the district auditor refused to sign off social services accounts from which £11m have gone astray.

Around £1m of that will have to be written off due to a failure to chase debts – but the council has found £1m in a bank account it had "lost" for five years. The council's head of finance Chris Gray has now applied for early retirement after admitting that the problems with the accounts were huge, with thousands of invoices "not traceable".

Mr Jackson has been at Oxfordshire for just over a year so cannot be held accountable for all of the uselessness. However, the situation must be familiar. In 2001 he quit as executive director of finance at North Tyneside council, when it emerged the council was in deep trouble with debts of £6.4m. A report by councillors concluded that Mr Jackson and fellow senior managers had a "sense of complacency" about financial planning and had kept councillors and auditors in the dark about escalating debt. Services had to be cut drastically.

Shamefaced councillors in Oxfordshire admit they should have acted on requests for more finance staff and have promised to get things sorted out. But voters who think a new regime might handle things better will struggle to achieve much change. The council is almost irretrievably hung (24 Tories, 24 Labour, 20 Lib Dems and one Green) and power will, as usual, be decided on the basis of who can stomach a coalition.

NICE ONE, N1

WHILE some councils devise clever homelessness strategies to deal with the fall-out from the ever-rising cost of housing, Islington council is poised to turf around 200 people out on to the street.

It is pressing ahead with plans to sell around 120 homes on the open market to raise funds for a big private finance initiative to revamp more than 1,000 properties.

The homes to be sold are part of so-called "short-life" housing cooperatives which lease unrefurbished properties, pending demolition or modernisation, from the council. The co-ops then rent them to low income families and single homeless people who are too far down the housing priority list to stand a chance of getting an assured council tenancy. Some of these short-life tenancies in Islington have lasted 25 years, with residents doing a lot of work on the properties.

While the council is legally within its rights to end the lease and evict tenants, other boroughs which have sold similar properties – such as Lambeth – have at least rehoused the tenants rather than turf them out.

THAT'S RICH-MOND

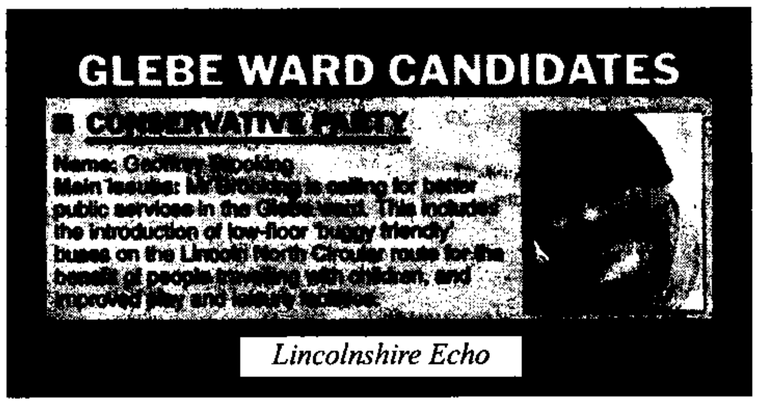
TORY-run Richmond council in south-west London has renewed its controversial agreement with Tory Westminster council which will run Richmond's communications operation for another two years.

Westminster's director of communications, former Conservative party spin-doctor and chicken-wrestler Alex Aiken, will thus organise media, marketing, government relations and tourism for Richmond under a newly-extended £300,000-a-year contract while doing the same for Westminster.

When Westminster won the contract last year to run Richmond's outsourced communications, there was anger in several quarters (including Richmond's own Tory group) at the lack of a proper tender. Aiken and his staff vehemently denied the move could cause the politicising of the communications office, but that still leaves the possibility of a conflict of interest when the two councils find themselves competing for funding or participation in the same schemes.

Clearly Richmond is happy with the arrangement, but by extending the contract it has again avoided the need for a bothersome tender. Since it would take an electoral miracle to dislodge the Tories from either Richmond or Westminster, the cosy set up is likely to last for some time.

PS: Aiken's most dramatic public appearance so far remains the occasion during the 1997 general election campaign when the *Mirror* sent its own giant chicken to accost the famous Tory chicken in Smith Square. Aggressive pecking ensued between the two bird-costumed jesters until the interloper was wrestled to the ground by Aiken, then the Tories' head of regional press.



Lincolnshire Echo

DEMOCKERY RULES

WITH local elections looming, councillors in Lincolnshire are demonstrating a bizarre grasp of democracy. They are barring any of their elected colleagues who might support whistleblower David Bowles from attending a meeting on Mr Bowles' future.

As we reported in *Eye* 1104, it was his evidence as county council chief executive that landed former Tory leader Jim Speechley in jail for trying to alter the route of a bypass to increase the value of his own land.

But opposition councillors from the council's Labour group have been barred from a meeting of the appointments committee because they might be, er, "biased".

● JOB OF THE WEEK: Southwark council is advertising for a new tea "lady" via recruitment website www.jobsgopublic.com – with a salary listed as, er, £56,000. Nice work if you can get it.

QUEER FOLK

ARTHUR Templeton, a DUP councillor recently convicted of homophobic harassment, remains on Newtownabbey council.

Templeton was convicted by Belfast magistrates of harassment against independent candidate John Blair during local election canvassing. The court heard that in 2001 Templeton shouted at Blair that "his election rosette should be pink because he is gay". During by-election campaigning in 2002 Templeton shouted at Blair that he "liked his shirt, it was queer, and so was he". And on election day Templeton confronted Blair outside a polling station and told him he might "need someone to hold his hand while he crossed the road". He then followed Mr Blair, bent down in front of him and patted his backside, saying: "Here you are John." Templeton denied this and said he had been tying his shoelace.

Magistrate Sarah Creanor fined him £250 and described him as "childish". Undaunted, Templeton told the *Belfast Telegraph* that homosexuality was "against God's teaching", saying everything that happened was "robust political campaigning". Ian Paisley's DUP suspended Templeton ahead of a meeting of party officers.

The Northern Ireland policing board is seeking legal advice on dismissing Templeton from Newtownabbey district policing partnership. A motion calling for him to resign his council seat was laid before Newtownabbey council, although it would have no authority to force him to go. With a tie of nine votes each way (as most of the Ulster Unionist group failed to attend) the casting vote went to mayor Paul Girvan of the DUP, who voted for Templeton to stay.

● CHAOS over the postal vote experiment peaked in Oldham where accusations of electoral fraud culminated in the arrest of one of the candidates on suspicion of stealing postal voting slips. Lib Dem Aftab Hussain has not been charged and was due to fight the metropolitan borough council seat while on police bail. His arrest followed a report to Knacker from a family who said they had been visited by men offering to "look after" their ballot papers. They allegedly left with five papers.

LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELDS

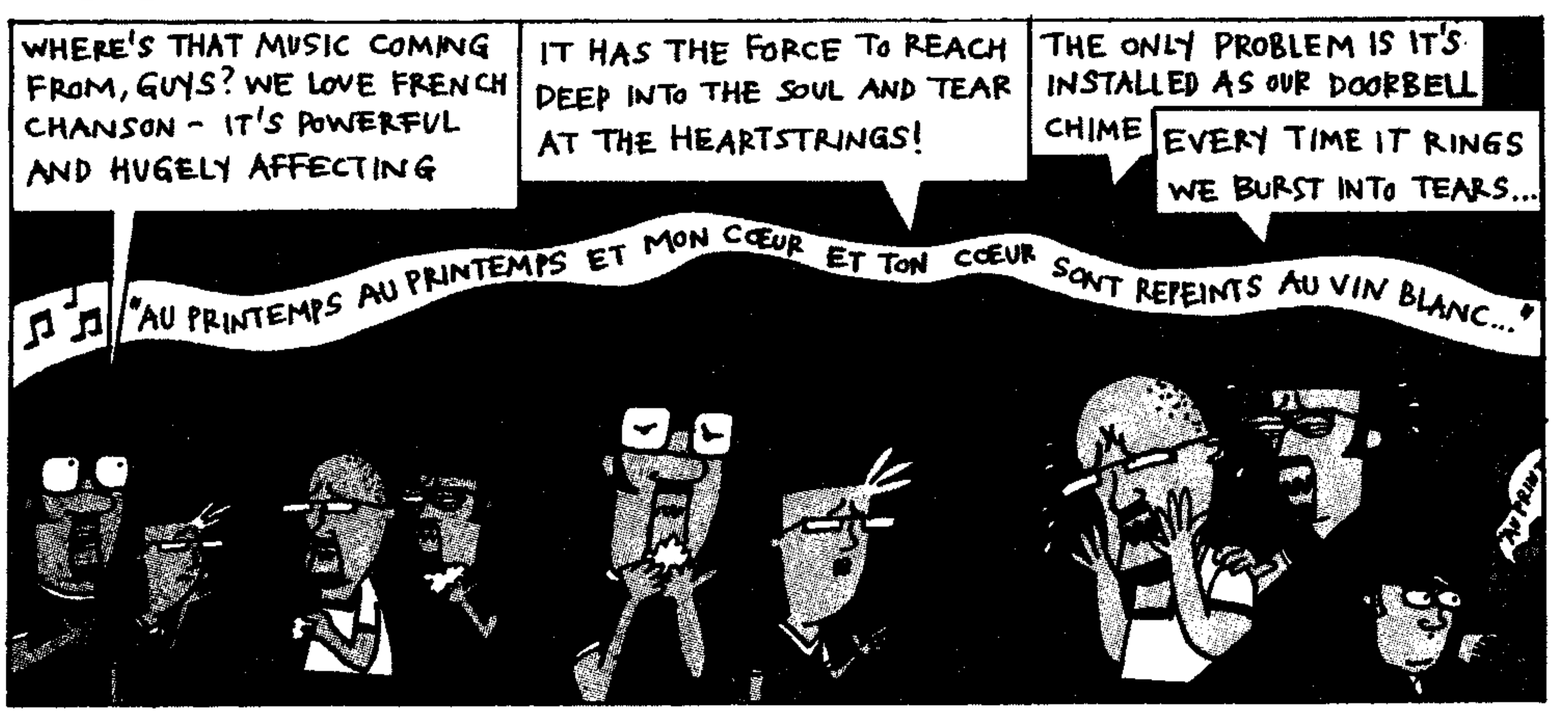
ANOTHER week, another round of hand-wringing over obesity in Britain's over-fed, under-exercised children… and another batch of playing fields fall prey to developers.

In Easthampstead, **Berkshire**, Brakenhale School has been given the go-ahead by the department for education and skills to sell its playing fields to raise £4m for renovations and expansion at the school. Around 60 new houses are likely to go on the land.

Meanwhile in **Ayrshire**, education bosses are pushing ahead with plans to build a replacement school on the Old Racecourse site, currently used by dozens of youth sports teams (*Eye* 1102). In fact, so determined are they to see the plans go ahead that at a recent meeting they committed themselves to carrying the plan through "irrespective of timescale or source of funding" if the campaign to save the sports pitches creates problems with the private finance for the scheme.

However, there was a surprising victory for playing fields campaigners in Washington, **Tyne and Wear**, where a letter from Buckingham Palace saved the Princess Anne Park. The City of Sunderland College will have to find a new site for its new £7.7m campus after confirmation that the Queen greeted residents of the then brand-new new town on the site 27 years ago was enough to convince planners the park was a "village green" and save it from vanishing under concrete.

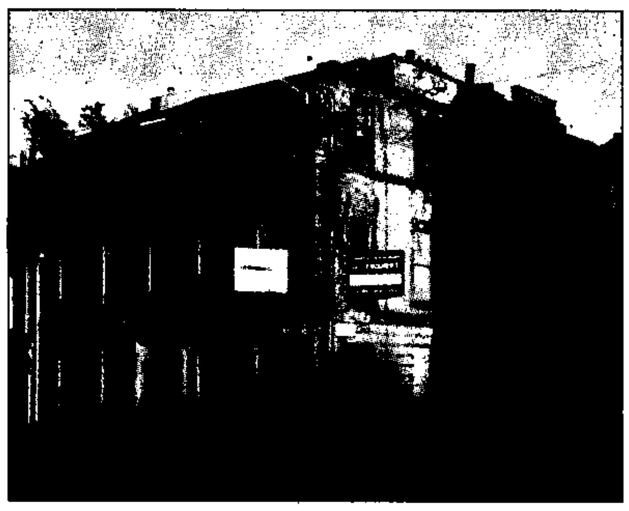
IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON — KNIFE ET PACKER


WHERE'S THAT MUSIC COMING FROM, GUYS? WE LOVE FRENCH CHANSON - IT'S POWERFUL AND HUGELY AFFECTING
IT HAS THE FORCE TO REACH DEEP INTO THE SOUL AND TEAR AT THE HEARTSTRINGS!
THE ONLY PROBLEM IS IT'S INSTALLED AS OUR DOORBELL CHIME
EVERY TIME IT RINGS WE BURST INTO TEARS...
"AU PRINTEMPS AU PRINTEMPS ET MON CŒUR ET TON CŒUR SONT REPEINTS AU VIN BLANC..."

NOOKS and CORNERS

THE city council is up to its old tricks in Glasgow, where another important listed building is coming down due to that time-honoured method of letting it go derelict. At least it hasn't "gone on fire", which is something.

The case of 105-107 West Regent Street is complicated but instructive. It was an elegant Late Georgian stone house which the great Glasgow architect Alexander 'Greek' Thomson carefully and cleverly enlarged along Wellington Street in 1872, giving both the old front and the new wing splendid entrances. Thomson then moved his practice to offices in the new extension.



At the beginning of the 1990s the building was derelict and empty, planning permission and listed building consent having been granted for a near-replica replacement office block. But nothing happened, and in 1999 the owner, County Properties, applied to build an entirely new building on the site. Though 1999 was the year Glasgow was the Arts Council's UK City of Architecture and Design and a major exhibition about Thomson was held in the new "Lighthouse", the council was happy to allow the West Regent Street building to be pulled down. Fortunately, Historic Scotland opposed demolition and a local public inquiry was planned.

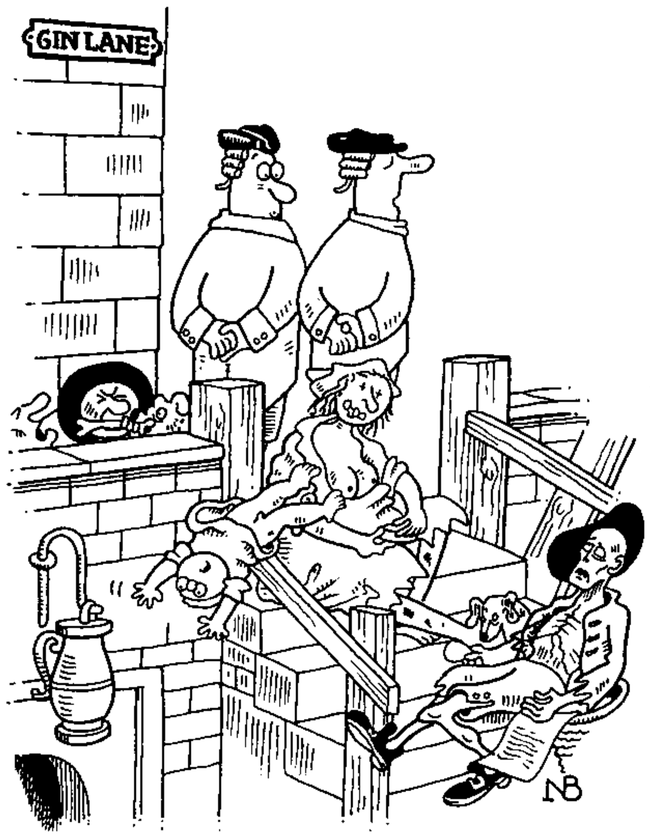
However, lawyers acting for County Properties then argued that an inquiry under a reporter appointed by Historic Scotland would infringe the developer's rights under the European convention and, in the court of session, Lord Macfadyen agreed. So in the opinion of this egregious judge, a nation should have no means to defend its national artistic heritage.

Fortunately the Scottish Executive appealed and, in 2001, in a judgment concerning three cases (the other two in England), the House of Lords decided such an inquiry *was* compatible with the human rights act. Disconcerted by this good news, County Properties then retreated and sold the West Regent Street building to another developer who at first announced that the exterior of the neglected and partly wrecked building would be retained and restored. And then – surprise, surprise – Mosslea Properties, registered in the Virgin Islands, decided this was not economic and applied for listed building consent to demolish. So back to square one.

Glasgow city council did nothing; the building deteriorated further to the point where, on 27 May, council officials decided it was a danger to the public and must come down. At the last ditch Historic Scotland offered 25 percent of the money for shoring it up, but nobody would come up with the rest.

So, despite planning legislation and the commitment of the Scottish Parliament to architecture, despite the efforts by Historic Scotland and others, despite all the lawyers' fees and wordy considered judgments by noble peers in the Upper House, yet another of Glasgow's listed buildings is coming down because the city council will not exercise its powers to compel their owners to keep them in repair.

'Piloti'



"This is 'Happy Hour' – wait till the clubs turn out later"

HIGH PRINCIPALS

WITH a serious national shortage of midwives and specialist nurses, Northumbria University has found a way to make things even worse: get rid of the people who can train new ones.

Lecturers at the School of Health, Community and Education Studies (HCES) have received letters telling them their jobs are at risk and inviting them to apply for voluntary redundancy. The school provides courses in midwifery and advanced nursing and trains specialists in subjects like intensive care nursing or chronic care. Nineteen teaching and research posts in HCES are to be shed.

Staff in the School of Arts and Social Sciences and in the School of Informatics are also being warned of job cuts. The university's vice-chancellor Kel Fidler says these are necessary to assure the future of the rest of the university after the three schools showed a projected combined shortfall of £5.8m against their business plans.

Yet Fidler isn't short of cash himself. His salary rocketed by 27 percent this year to £160,000 – the third highest pay rise in the country for a university boss. Not only that but he can apparently find £60m to expand his empire and has plans for a seven-acre new campus site designed to take another 3,000 students (which the university says it hopes will come mainly from overseas).

GRADUATION day looms again, but at Edinburgh a mystery remains following last year's ceremony.

Distinguished professor of divinity David Wright, who was about to retire, was selected to deliver the key address. Alas, the speech he submitted to university principal Timothy O'Shea was banned – as was Wright.

Eventually the authorities relented and Wright's forlorn figure was seen on the platform. But why was he censored? His text, recently published in the newsletter of Edinburgh's history graduates, is pretty inoffensive, including a very mild attack on education secretary Charles Clarke for his philistine remarks about medieval studies.

Instead, could the principal have been upset by Prof Wright's light-hearted jibes at the damage done to what he called "our linguistic heritage"? Wright revealed: "The University has just appointed a high heidgin responsible for 'knowledge management'" (ie a librarian who is now known as "the vice principal for knowledge management"). Moreover, he said, "we have a new school called a School of Health and Well-being… Perhaps a ceremony like this will soon see candidates capped with an MA for Well-being".

The ban caused dismay among Wright's students, including the Rev Istvan Pasztori-Kupan from Romania, who wrote a furious letter to the university senate objecting to the "humiliation" of his respected professor. In the time-honoured traditions of free speech at Edinburgh, the letter has not been published (until now).

LEGAL NEWS

IN 1990, two years after two British soldiers had been dragged from their car by a crowd at a funeral and murdered by IRA gunmen, Belfast-born Sean O'Cealleagh was jailed for aiding and abetting their killing.

After his Good Friday agreement-brokered release in 1998, O'Cealleagh moved to America where he married and was granted permanent residency in 2001. In February this year, however, the US immigration service caught up with him and sought his deportation on the grounds of "moral turpitude" – a charge rejected by Judge Rose Peters in a Los Angeles court on 23 April. Judge Peters ruled that O'Cealleagh's crime was "purely political" and he should therefore be free to remain in America.

Abu Hamza, Osama bin Laden's biggest fan, is currently in Belmarsh high security jail waiting to see if he will be sent to the US under supposedly reciprocal extradition arrangements to face charges of supporting terrorism. The full hearing of his case is scheduled for 23 July – which gives him plenty of time to switch his allegiance to the IRA, and, presumably, escape US attorney-general John Ashcroft's clutches.

SIGNS of life at the Saville inquiry, which went into hibernation in February so legal teams could prepare their closing summaries.

Those still won't be ready until October, but the Guildhall in Londonderry is this week hosting an "oral session… at which the tribunal will seek any necessary clarification of written submissions" (though they are, thankfully, "not intended to allow the repetition orally of that which is contained in those submissions").

The inquiry has now been running for six and a half years and the last official estimate of its cost was £155m – though that figure will have risen considerably since then, not least thanks to the £4,000 a week rent Lord Saville has been paying for the Guildhall throughout the months when it has not been in use.

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

Letters

Trucking hell

Sir,

Your article (Road Rage, 1107) misses the real issue. It may be that road transport is too cheap and escapes the environmental costs but the fact is that it is too expensive here compared with other countries. In my job delivering new and used trucks all over Britain I am overtaken regularly by vehicles registered in mainland Europe and beyond, usually at well over the 90kph speed limit, which are running on fuel bought abroad or in Ireland at half the UK price and often with drivers from the former eastern bloc with questionable qualifications and paid a fraction of UK wage rates. These operators and drivers are outside the law because of increasing reliance on passive detection such as speed cameras, lack of on-the-spot fines and the general difficulty of enforcing prosecutions against foreigners. I estimate that one in five maximum-weight trucks on the motorways is now foreign registered and they depress the rates and undercut legitimate British hauliers. Customers have come to expect that goods will be delivered for next to nothing and are not bothered how they get there.

In my experience British road transport is generally run safely, legally and professionally compared to elsewhere, despite the occasional high profile case of malpractice which sometimes appears in the headlines. The old trade-in lorries which I have to collect are usually well maintained and seldom in bad condition and British drivers have higher skills, better training and greater competence levels than most others, despite the poor image of the job and the abysmal wages and conditions.

Yours in the transport cafe,
GEORGE A. BROWN,

Glasgow.

Sir,

Hedgehog's article is absolutely correct in its essence, but yet again I find myself exasperated by the failure to differentiate between the people who own and operate vehicles (and within this the difference between corporations and smaller independent haulage companies) and the hapless saps who drive them.

Yet again I will state to you that as a driver I couldn't care less about the price of fuel, that law "bending" and breaking is rife within the industry and that a very serious debate about transport and infrastructure in this country and across Europe (worldwide, even) is needed urgently.

Yours sincerely,
DENNIS TEARLE,

Basingstoke.

Sir,

Hedgehog shouldn't forget (Road Rage, 1107) that it's not just truckers who suffer from high fuel prices; it's all of us. We have the most expensive fuel in the world and something like 83 percent of each and every gallon goes straight into Greedy Gordon's pockets in tax!

Those of us who live in semi-rural and rural areas (where public transport varies between non-existent and pisspoor) rely on our cars to get us any further than the local shops and the greed of successive governments in over taxing fuel makes life expensive for us. We need an immediate cut in fuel duty of at least 10p.

CHRIS BURMAJSTER,

Marlow Bottom, Bucks.

Sir,

Good to read your anti-road transport columnist rave on again about the iniquity of supermarkets not having to pay the full environmental cost of using lorries to ensure they can offer a vast selection of fresh cheap food to the UK's consumers. This wouldn't be the same distribution system you use to get your publication on the doormats and newsagents across the country every fortnight would it? Nice to see balanced objective journalism in action, not letting facts get in the way of preconceived prejudices. I look forward to the Hitler Diaries and the Iraq photos.

BILL DEAN,

Manchester.

Smoke in the Eye

Sir,

How noble of you to expose some highly questionable actions by British American Tobacco (1107). In particular I'd like to congratulate you for including Christian Aid's report which revealed that children as young as six were at risk from nicotine poisoning.

I was then surprised to see a full-page advert for the pro-smoking lobby FOREST with some highly questionable statistics on smoking.

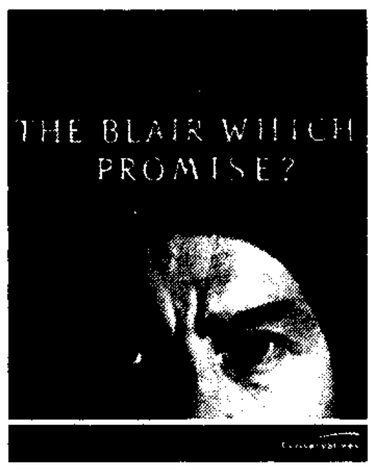
Hypocritical?

Yours sincerely,
SANDRA ROBINSON,

Luton.

Lookalike

Tory June election poster



Simon Hughes mayoral election poster, launched last January

Sir,

Shurely when Lord Saatchi, Tory co-chair and advertising supremo, asked the public to submit ideas for the party's June election poster campaign, he did not mean pinching them from the Lib Dems?

Ena B. Mills,

London W1.

The Streets

Sir,

With reference to Husband's Yobettes strip (1107), I fear he may be betraying his vintage. Even accounting for the ongoing mutation of urban street slang, the phrases "Yo" and "Bleedin' 'ell" when placed immediately beside one another are frankly insoluble. Either stick with "Oi, bleedin 'ell" – or better still, "Yo, Beee-yatch", in the correct demotic.

Yours faithfully,
MISS JOANNA RIDENHAUER
(aged 15),

Via email.

Number crunching

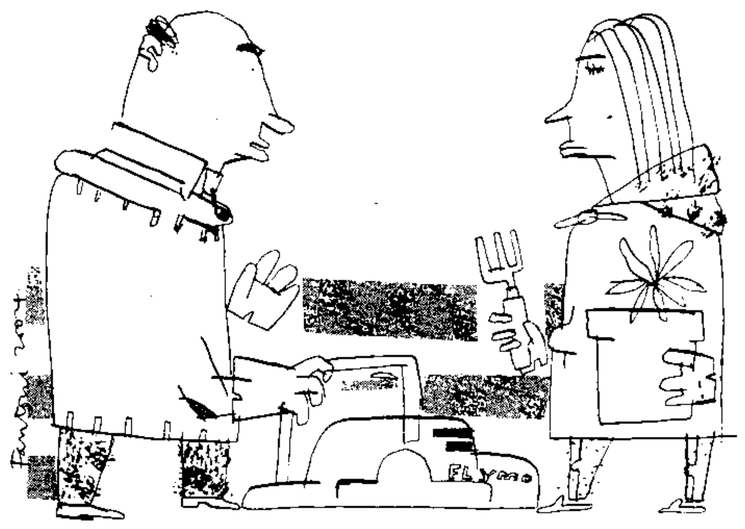
50 Cent

■ Name of US rapper

50 Dollars

■ Price of tickets to see him on UK tour this summer

Scenes You Seldom See



"Perhaps seven o'clock on a Sunday morning is a bit early to mow the lawn. I'll leave it till after lunch"

Barcode humbug

Sir,

Re your latest bit of library-bashing: "[Coates] points to the spending on hundreds of new barcodes [for] books which already have usable barcodes printed on the back by the publishers". Er, no. Books published in some countries since about 1970 have ISBNs, and in most cases barcodes encoding them, but they only tell a librarian which edition of a title a book is – the number will be the same for the entire print run. In order to identify a particular "copy" of that title you need a unique number for it alone, hence library barcodes. Without them any authority with more than one copy of a book anywhere in its system could not tell whether it was in stock, loaned or whatever.

MIKE MORRIS,

Librarian, ISCA.

All that jazz

Sir,

In response to Music & Musicians (1107), I can't help feeling that couching jazz between "light entertainment" and "so-called world music" sums up the narrow path your columnist usually treads. As a jazz musician with a firm background in classical music, I can assure you that Radio 3 is the only place where a listener might hear challenging and interesting modern jazz. Jazz FM or Radio 2 is all very well, if your taste runs from has-been to asinine; however, since jazz is often as sophisticated and innovative as any other serious music, perhaps it deserves its place on Radio 3. Furthermore, since Ravel, Copland, Cage, Glass, Reich and many others, have acknowledged their own debts to jazz, possibly your columnist could afford it more respect. Or is he/she the type who cannot improvise?

Yours,
TOM PILLING,

London N4.

Spot the moron

Sir,

Your Moronic Inferno feature (1107) states that Piers Morgan's TV series lost 9 million viewers between its first and second series. This implies an audience of 27 million viewers for the first series and a mere 18 million for the second. I know that Piers was popular, but surely not ***that*** *popular?*

Keep up the good work.

Yours faithfully,
DR JOHN TIERNEY,

Wirral, Merseyside.

● ***Sorry. It should have read 0.9 million. Ed.***

Unhealthy bodies

Sir,

Sharon Grant, the chair of the CPPIH (Commission for Paralysis of Public Involvement in Health) is being disingenuous when she claims that the new patient involvement systems is a success (28 May). It is not – it is a scandal.

Look at the CPPIH website. No details about how to contact the new Patients' Forums – they are hidden from the public and the names of their membership a secret! Aren't Patients' Forums supposed to be new statutory public bodies that monitor the NHS?

The CPPIH has privatised patient and public involvement by handing the administration over to voluntary sector organisations, which are reported across the country to be providing woefully inadequate services in many cases and consuming most of the money on administration – money that should be funding the Patients' Forums.

The truth is that most Patients' Forums are tiny (three or four members), there are resignations across the country and the CPPIH is toothless and does virtually nothing to improve the NHS (last press release about health on 26 February).

The CPPIH is spending over £30m of our money each year and since they were set up in January 2003 have destroyed – not developed – patient and public involvement in the NHS.

Time for Sharon Grant to retire back to Tottenham and hand the CPPIH over to a chair that will be a thorn in the side of government and a champion for patients' and carers' needs and rights in the NHS.

MALCOLM ALEXANDER,
Chair, Patients' Forum for the LAS (former Director of the Association of CHCs).

Sir,

Re: Healthy Debate (1107, p15). Was I the only person to notice that SHARON GRANT is an anagram of ARROGANT NHS?

PHIL PARKER,
Southampton.

Lookalike

Andy

Andy

Sir,

Has anybody noticed the extraordinary resemblance between Andy Pandy and the BBC's political chap, Andrew Marr?

NAME AND ADDRESS WITHHELD.

LUVVIES

"I so needed to be Catwoman in that moment," she said. "I so needed to make some tough life decisions for myself, and putting on that suit made it a whole lot easier."

HALLE BERRY
Metro

"He [Peter O'Toole] taught me how to pee," she cries, but does not go into detail, and I don't want to abuse her civil rights or my own by making her do so.

JAN MUIR interviews
SAFFRON BURROWS
Daily Telegraph

"I don't want to be the voice of a generation, yet I have felt that thrust upon me."

Actress CHLOE SEVIGNY
interviewed in the
Sunday Times Magazine

Submitted by Graeme Fisher, Andrew Blackman, John D. Goodge.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Cross line

Sir,

No one should cast any slur on the responsiveness of BT to customer complaints (Letters, 1107). I queried the improper charge of £400 levied on users of the rotten and ruinously expensive ISDN service when seeking to upgrade to the broadband facility that was installed at no charge to everyone else. The response was commendable for its swiftness.

My telephone line was cut off and my answering service suspended. The technical staff to whom the fault was reported advised that there was no technical problem. Just an instruction to "refer to commercial". Two weeks and a letter to the chairman eventually saw the line restored.

Oftel thought this was quite OK and saw no need to ask awkward questions on behalf of all those who had paid £400 to which BT was not entitled. So that's all right then. Or maybe Ofcom will take a different view?

Yours,
DAVID FAIRBAIRN,
Via email.

Gender bender

Sir,

Bookworm chastises me for referring to the author Flannery O'Connor as a man in a recent article. I didn't.

What I wrote about O'Connor's work was as follows: "Nobody whose writing I know has achieved more. Beautiful, brave, funny and wise. An exactitude in the writing, and the metaphors are enormously powerful." A sub-editor at the Mail on Sunday's Night and Day magazine made the ghastly mistake of inserting male references. The editor, Joanne Mallabar, has written to me to apologise, and a correction has been published.

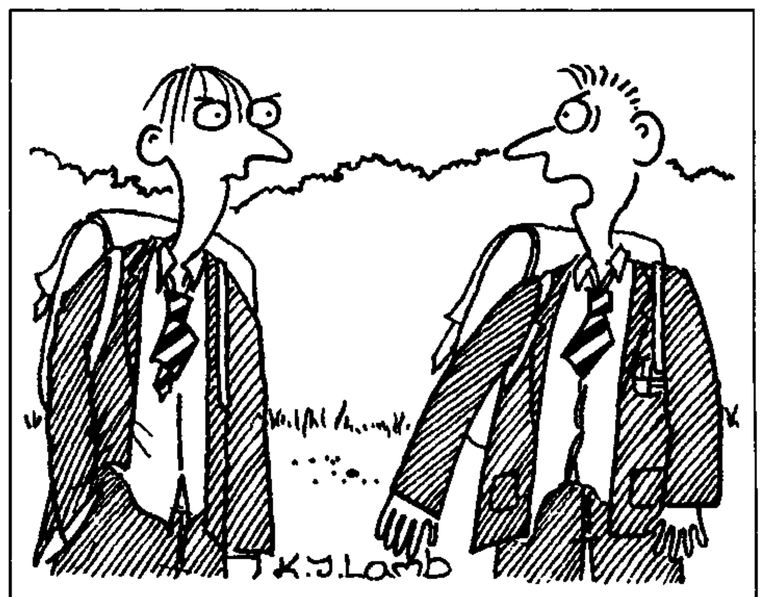
Best wishes,
JOSEPH O'CONNOR,
Via email.

Sir,

Bookworm correctly states (1107) that Flannery O'Connor was a woman, but goes on to suggest that this could be inferred from the title of her short story "A Good Man is Hard to Find".

In fact, the title refers not to a romantic quest, but to the difficulty of finding an honourable person in the modern world. The story is about a vacationing family who are murdered by an escaped convict.

Yours,
LAURA BROWN,
Via email.



"My dad's more incapacitated due to stress than your dad!"

Pepsy'd to the post

Sir,

Shamed to find myself in Pseuds Corner. But it was unsporting of you not to continue what I wrote, after the professorial pseudery: "Half Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground, half Samuel Pepys (I'll save you the trouble and send that sentence to Pseud's Corner myself)".

Douglas McCarthy owes me a fiver.

Yours,
JOHN SUTHERLAND,
Dept English, UCL, London.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

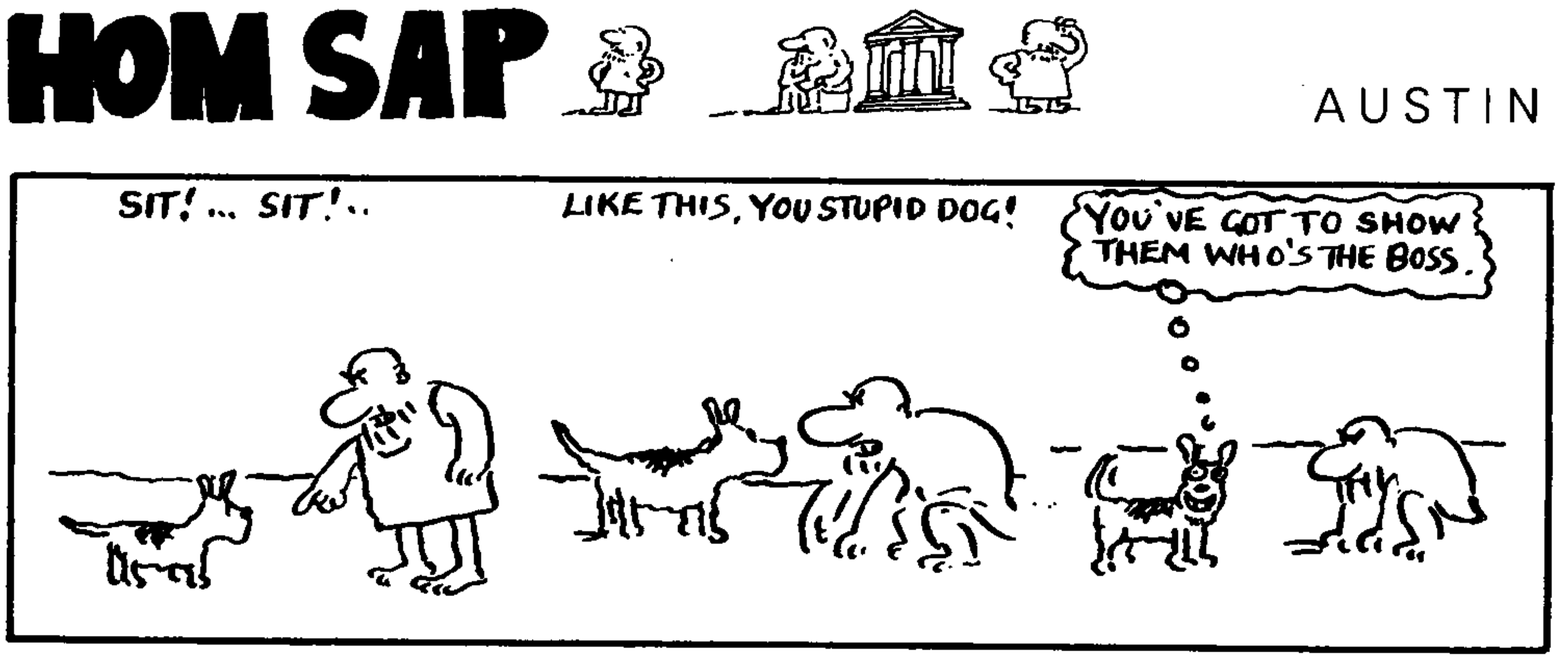
"Women are a large cross-section of society and that is a section of society we would very much like to penetrate."
MARK PALIOS, Radio 5 Live
(Paul Arnerich)

"He's been sent to the Sin Bin... so they'll miss his absence for the next 10 minutes..."
Commentator, Rugby Special
(Tim Freeman)

"... and if millions and millions of us are wearing M&S underwear, why are they falling down?"
CHRISTINE HAMILTON, Radio 2
(Bill Dowle)

"Nice little horse... gelded him... made a man out of him."
BRYAN SMART, Sky Sports 2
(Michael Turner)

"There's no doubt we'll be seen as a big fish in the First Division next year – everybody will be trying to knock us off our perch..."
KEVIN BLACKWELL (Leeds manager), Talksport
(Richard Collett)



Letter from **Brazil**

from Our Own Correspondent

IT WAS all going so well. A modern nation moving forward, the years of dictatorship and economic decay an ever more distant memory. Politics had almost become boring. But no longer.

In our wisdom we decided it was time to turn to the new left, with its plans to tackle some of the social problems and crime, both organised and disorganised, that rule the lives of most Brazilians.

We tried to avoid the mistake of having a Tony Blair figure as leader by voting in our answer to John Prescott as president just over a year ago. This is the figure of Luís Inácio da Silva, leader of our Labour party. He has a respectable career as a union leader behind him but has proved out of his depth in the top job and unable to control his minions.

His nickname of "Lula" was thought too informal for a president, so newsreaders have to refer to him by the unwieldy handle of "Luís Inácio Lula da Silva". This minor identity crisis is not helped by unkind rumours about his affection for the local firewater, leading to Yeltsinesque episodes that our national press is too polite to mention but which were recently brought to light by the *New York Times*, causing the leadership to threaten to withdraw the visa of the journalist responsible.

Cooler heads pointed out that such action would be too reminiscent of our military dictators and the matter was dropped, but not before the reaction had been broadcast worldwide as the leadership went off to do business with our liberal friends in China.

What the local press mentions relentlessly are the financial scandals and allegations of corruption, not only involving traditionally light-fingered right-wing businessmen/politicians, but also the Labour party itself. Television coverage was recently given to a secretly filmed video showing an aide to the second most powerful man in the government negotiating with a major figure in the Rio de Janeiro gambling scene, to obtain kickbacks to finance the campaigns of party figures in the city. A nice coda in the film has the aide asking for one percent of the total as his negotiating fee.

The government's curious response to the scandal was to close down Brazil's bingo halls on the ground that these were somehow part of an evil empire of money-laundering and corruption. The effect was to throw 5,000 people out of work and deprive an even larger number of little old ladies of some harmless fun and a place to spend the afternoon.

The employment question was relevant as our leader had promised to create 10 million jobs. After a year in office, unemployment stands at a record 13 percent. And although our new left leaders had 20 years in opposition to create their programme, since taking power they seem to have no idea what to do other than dismantle perfectly good projects, such as educational reform, installed by the previous administration.

Our excellent and effective system for evaluating universities — notorious for their Spanish practices but whose staff provide much of the theoretical underpinning for plans for our national utopia — is being scaled back because it has been revealing uncomfortable truths about how ineffective our theorists are at doing their day jobs.

And we have our own solution to such thorny issues as funding tertiary education. Our better universities tend to be federal institutions which charge no fees. But to pass the entrance examinations for these free courses, candidates generally need to have had an expensive secondary education. So the rich get free places and the poor pay to attend second-rate paper-mills. But our new left leaders, most of whom came up through this system, remain unaccountably quiet on the subject.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

O "Let us not delude ourselves," councillor Piotr Wszolkowski told the cultural committee of Ustka Town Council. "Our town's present crest is not very attractive. In particular, the mermaid's breasts are just not big enough, and this element of the design urgently needs altering. I have my own ideas of just how big they should be, and will soon put forward a modified design for immediate consideration by the entire Town Council."

The size of the mermaid's breasts on the traditional town crest had been raised earlier in the meeting by Adam Brzoska, the chairman of the committee on economic affairs. "The depiction of the mermaid reflects the tastes of another era," he told the meeting. "Bigger

breasts would obviously make the town more attractive to tourists, so she should be given silicone implants without delay." However, Town Council chairman Jan Olech disagreed, saying that "I find her breasts attractive as they are. Small breasts are a sign of youth, and their size is of secondary importance. The most important thing is that her breasts should be pretty and encourage visitors to want to holiday in Ustka." And Mayor Jacek Graczyk ruled that "as the matter has not been officially brought to my attention, it does not officially concern me. However, I should like to put on record that I like all mermaids, no matter what kind of tits they have."

The matter was referred to the Heraldic Commission of the Ministry of the Interior, whose formal permission will be required before any breast enlargement can take place. *(The Pomeranian Voice [Poland], 25/3/04. Spotter: Paul McNamara)*

O Articles for Sale: Bargirl Equipment.

Due to recent windfall and subsequent semi-retirement from the trade, the following items are for sale:

12-inch-high silver moon boots; Vinyl jumpsuit with accessory pocket; one dozen luminous ping-pong ball; Mobile phone w/flashing lights and extra-loud ringing tone; glitter lubricant; Lifetime membership at Daeng's Beauty Shop; phone list of 384 longstay punters for guaranteed cash on slow nights; Fully furnished 3.6m x 4m room with saquat toilet and wat-bum hose; new seening fan; and 2 mun pre-paid ren (by boyfren fum Switterlan); Woeful 'Request for Funds' letters in 63 tragic scenarios and 4 languages; Honda Wave motorbye (now dive the Benz).

Note: all items for lease with option to buy pending outcome of recent venture (maybe Switterlan too cole an boyfren not take care me good). Email: buffalosick@hotmail.com. (Phuket Gazette, 27/3/04. Spotter: Stefan Preese)

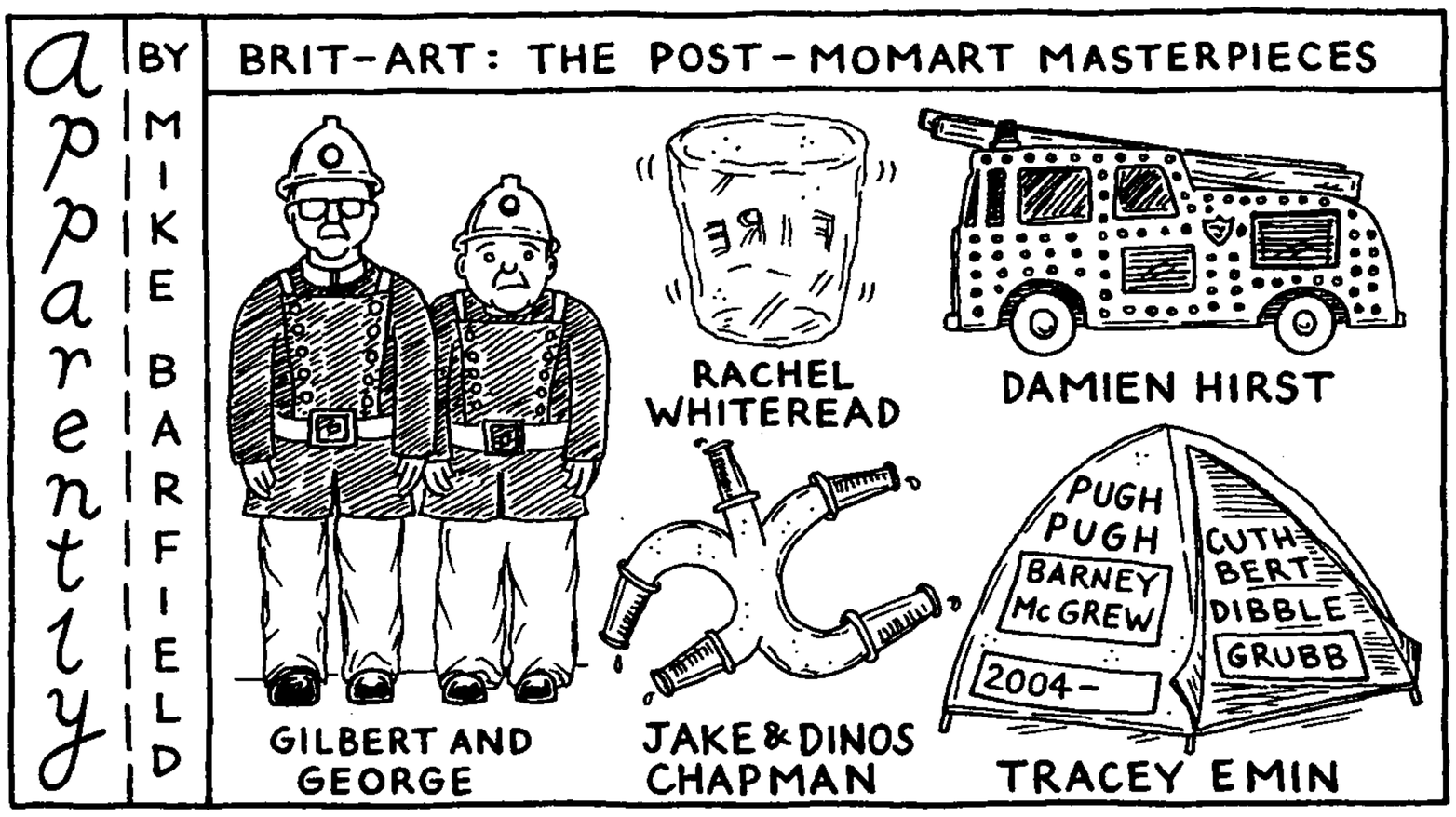
– O –

O "I'd already had a few drinks when Detective Wishnowsky came into the bar," Willie Mitford told reporters as he awaited sentencing in Palmerston North District Court, "and the gamble seemed like a good idea at the time. We started yakking over a beer, and the karaoke machine was playing, so I said to him, 'You get up there and sing me a song. If you're good, I'll plead guilty, but if you're lousy, you'll drop the case.' I was amazed when he agreed, and even more amazed when he turned out to be so good that I just had to plead guilty."

Detective Dave Wishnowsky then explained the unusual way in which he'd managed to get Mitford to confess to theft. "I just think it's great that off-duty, and socially, a criminal and a police officer can have a drink together and show respect to each other. I knew we hadn't got enough evidence against Willie to get a conviction, so his offer was worth taking up. I started singing Robbie Williams' hit 'Better Man', and by the time I'd got to the end of the first verse, he'd already come over, offering to shake my hand and telling me that he was guilty. When he made the bet, he didn't know that I was the lead vocalist in the band Xpose in the 1980s before I joined the force, and am an experienced performer. But he kept his word, and pleaded guilty today as he'd promised, which shows that deep down he's an honest man."

Mitford pointed out that "I only pleaded guilty because I lost the bet. Otherwise I would have demanded a full trial, and I know I would have got off. But a bet is a bet."

He was then sentenced to three-and-a-half years in prison. *(New Zealand Herald, 6/5/04. Spotter: Phil Bond)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

As you may know, this is a very historic week in the life of the parish!

No, not those silly little elections which some parishioners seem to find so exciting, like Mr Silk and the elderly Miss Collins, who I saw making a fool of herself the other day, driving down the High Street in her Rolls, waving to everyone.

No, what I'm talking about is much more important and historic than that!

Can any of the children tell me what happened 60 years ago this week?

Hamsa, you've got your hand up. No, not the foundation of a Zionist state in Israel, although that was a good guess! I'm talking about D-Day, when British and American forces, together in a coalition, had the courage to invade another country which was suffering under an evil tyrant with a moustache!

Does that ring any bells, children? Do you see any parallels with today? I know that's a long word to use in this newsletter, but it comes from the Greek '*para*', meaning airborne assault troops, and '*lell*', meaning going into hell for the sake of democracy!

So, I'm celebrating not just the old D-Day, when we won such a glorious victory, but the new D-Day (or 'Dubya Day' as I believe we should call it) which I am sure in the end will be seen as a victory just as glorious!

Am I right in thinking that if Mr Cook and Mrs Short and all those other embittered former members of the PCC had been around in the 1940s, they would have been on Mr Hitler's side? (No offence, guys, but it's true, isn't it?)

And here's another thought. In those days we were really serious when we said that we wanted to be at the heart of Europe! (Mr Howard, please note.)

But that's probably enough of going

down memory lane!

The sort of history I am interested in is in the future, not the past!

And I've still got a job to do here, whatever the gossip may be in the Working Men's Club when John stands Gordon a pint of – what is it they drink down there? – bitter, I expect!

After they've had a few, they get silly and start talking about who's going to be vicar next!

But I want everyone in the parish to know once and for all that I've got that job to do, and I'm going to see it through, however long it takes.

I've even composed a chorus which I hope you will all enjoy singing at next week's Evening Service (when, alas, I won't be able to be with you, because I have to be abroad on my many outreach missions to bring the message of peace to all mankind – after all, wasn't that the whole point of our great Middle East crusade in the first place?).

These are the words:

I've got a job to do,
I'm going to see it through.
I give this pledge to you,
Let's all do it too.

(Words and music T. Blair)

Yours for ever and ever, amen!

Tony

(Not forgetting the women, of course – thanks for reminding me, Cherie!)

St Albion's Goes Interactive!!!

Your chance to put your questions directly to the vicar!

Q: Vicar, I am deeply concerned about the recent deaths of servicemen at our local training camp. Don't you think that you should look into this tragedy?

The Vicar writes: May I say that no one is more sorry about these events than me, and I would like to begin by offering my heartfelt condolences to all those who have lost loved ones in this very sad episode.

Q: Vicar, I am deeply concerned about the growing number of servicemen who are being killed in Iraq. Would it be right to send out more of them?

The Vicar writes: May I say that no one is more sorry about these events than me, and I would like to begin by offering my heartfelt condolences to all those who have lost loved ones in this very sad episode.

Q: Does the Vicar think it is morally right for local train drivers to go on strike on the day of the elections?

The Vicar writes: May I say that no one is more sorry about these events than me, and I would like to offer my heartfelt condolences to all those who

The Editor writes: For space reasons we'll have to leave it there, but our thanks to all those parishioners who have taken part in this very important exercise in parish democracy.

The vicar attends a special service to celebrate victory in Europe!

Parish Postbag

Dear Sir,

I was really angry when I drove into the forecourt of our local Tesco 24/7 filling station to see that a litre of unleaded petrol had gone up to 109p. Who are we to blame for this catastrophic rise? My own view is that the fault lies with all those who kept preaching sanctimonious sermons about the need for armed intervention in the Middle

Yours sincerely,
Gordon Brown.

(Please note change of address: from September I will be moving to The Vicarage, St Albion's)

The Editor writes: Letters may be cut for reasons of space or blatant disloyalty.

That Thatcher Eulogy For President Reagan In Full

WE CELEBRATE today the greatest statesman the world has ever known, a colossus who bestrode the globe and reshaped the destiny of the planet. Born of humble origins, this leader rose to the highest office of state by strength of character, uncompromising politics and an unswerving sense of right and wrong, personally bringing about the end of communism, and the revitalisation of the international economy. But enough of me. We are here to remember Ronald Reagan, who was privileged to have known the woman they called "The Iron Lady" *(cont. for 94 minutes).*

© Charles Moore, the Daily Maggiegraph, Canary Cold Wharf.

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam
Ronald Reagan, 40th President of the United States of America
(1911-2004)

So. Farewell
Then Ronald
Reagan

Famous film
Star and
President.

"One for
The Gipper",
Yes, that
Was your
Catchphrase.

Now you are
"One for the
Reaper".

E.J. Thribb (17½)

GLENDA SLAGG

FLEET STREET'S MISTRESS ROYAL!!?!

■ QUEEN CAMILLA – pull the other one, mister, it's got wedding bells on it!?! Or rather it hasn't!???! Let's face it, you'll never be our Queen of Hearts because you look like the back end of a bus!!!? – No disrespect, Ma'am!!! If Charles has any sense, he'll keep you out of sight in a horsebox where you belong!!?!? No disrespect again, Ma'am, but kids today want their queen to look like Posh Spice or Jordan – not Lily Savage on a bad hair day!!?!? Or Bad *Heir* day???!! Geddit??????!

■ FOR God's sake, Charles, make an honest woman of her!!??! The whole nation has warmed to this lovable Queen of Hearts who likes a fag and a drink just like the rest of us!!?! If you don't marry her, you must be barmy (no disrespect, sire), so get down on your royal bended knee and pop the question: "Camilla, will you help me up again?" (Glenda's little joke!!!) But seriously, Chazza, hurry up and get her to the church on time, ie before you die??!?!?

■ GORDON RAMSAY – aren'tcha-sickofhim? This foul-mouthed Chef leaves a nasty taste in your mouth – just like his food!!??! Know what I'd like, Gordon???! I'd like to microwave you goodbye for ever?!? F* off, Gordon!!??! And I don't mean flambé!!?? Geddit????!**

■ GORDON RAMSAY – What a Michelin Star!!?!!! With his chef's hat and his fruity language, he makes cooking f**!!!? That's Fun, mister, with a capital F!!!?? It's the best television I've seen since the last programme he was on??!?!? Mmmmm!!!!! Delicious!???! Pass me the f***ing pan, Gordon, and I'll f** up an egg!!??!

■ SEBASTIAN COE – What a disgrace!!??! How can he be our Mr Olympics when he's running around with his trousers round his ankles??!? No wonder London's gonna lose the Olympics when its star performer is hoping to beat the world record for the four-minute bonk!!?? On your marks, get set... go away!!?!

■ SO Lord Coe had a bit of nookie on the side – so what???? This is the twentieth century for gawd's sake!!!!?? *(No, it isn't. Ed.)* Surely we're grown up enough not to care whether this super athlete has spent his time a-rumpin' and a-pumpin' with every gorgeous gal he meets instead of flying the flag for his country!!??! What's the matter with us????! Let's face it, London is the sex capital of the world and our Seb is just the man to have on the job!!?! Geddit???!??

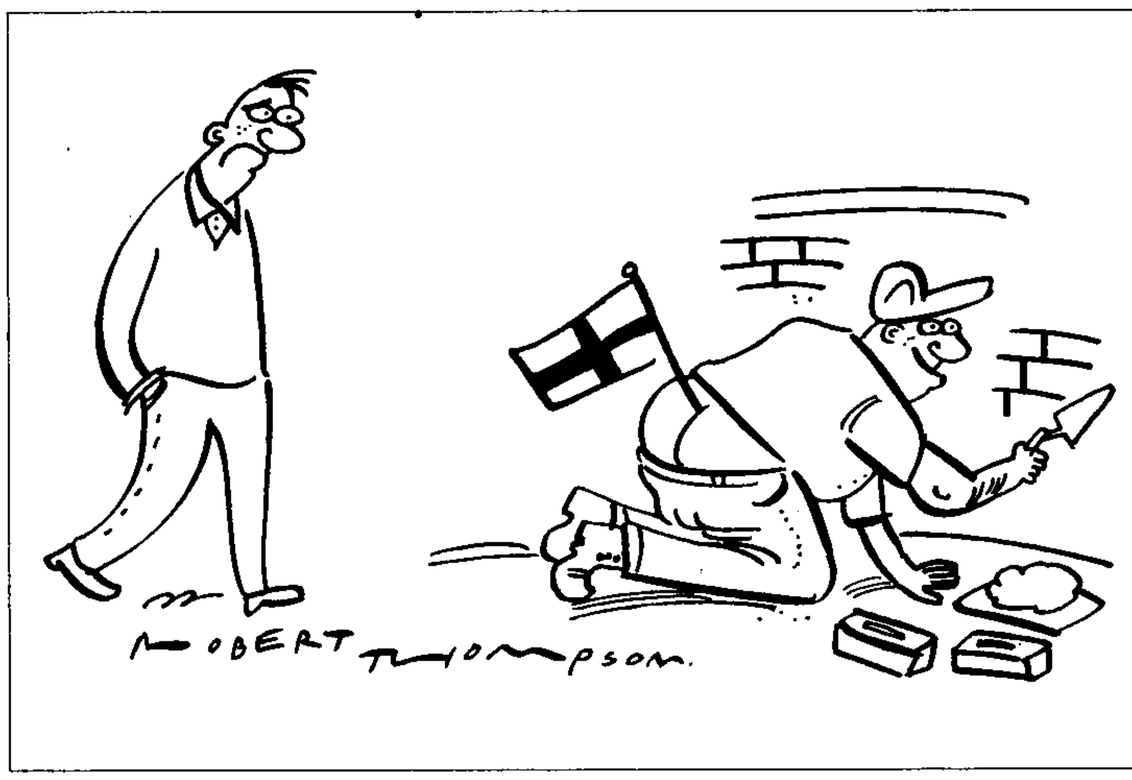
■ HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's Super-Thursday-Men (Geddit!!?)

● **Robert Kilroy-Silk** – UKIP's Mr Sex!!?! U can come round and KIP at my place anytime, big boy!!?!

● **Jose Mourinho** – You're Chelsea's Mr Big!!???! Well, come and prove it by scoring with this gal!!???!

● **The Dalai Lama** – Crazy name, crazy guy!!!?!?

Byeeee!!!



PRINCE CHARLES' MEDALS

IN RESPONSE to readers asking about the medals Prince Charles was wearing during the D-Day celebrations, Private Eye gives a quick at-a-glance guide to our most decorated heir to the throne.

■ **The Grand Order of the Carbuncle.**
For his part in the campaign against modern architecture.

■ **The Imperial Cross of Asparagus.**
For his brave stand against artificial GM fertilisers.

■ **The Queen Victoria Iron Cross for Watercolours.**
Awarded for "Donkey in the Moonlight" 1982.

■ **The King Edward VII Star for Adultery *(surely Gallantry, Ed?)***
For his services at the Battle of Camilla-Legover (1984-2004).

(That's enough medals, Ed.)

Read

SALLY JOCKSTRAP ON EURO 2004

Only in Private Eye

SAYS SALLY: Tim Henman will be leading our boys out to face the mighty Saudi Arabia in the Vodafone Derby, the biggest cycle race the world has ever seen. And I'll be there every day giving you the inside story of the competition they call Wimbledon 2001! Join me, Sally Jockstrap for this great summer of golf!

BLAIR – 'WE WILL HAND OVER SOVEREIGNTY'

by Our Political Correspondent **Hugh Rowe-Sceptic**

THE Prime Minister gave a categorical assurance last night that he would hand over the sovereignty of Great Britain to Brussels "at the first possible opportunity".

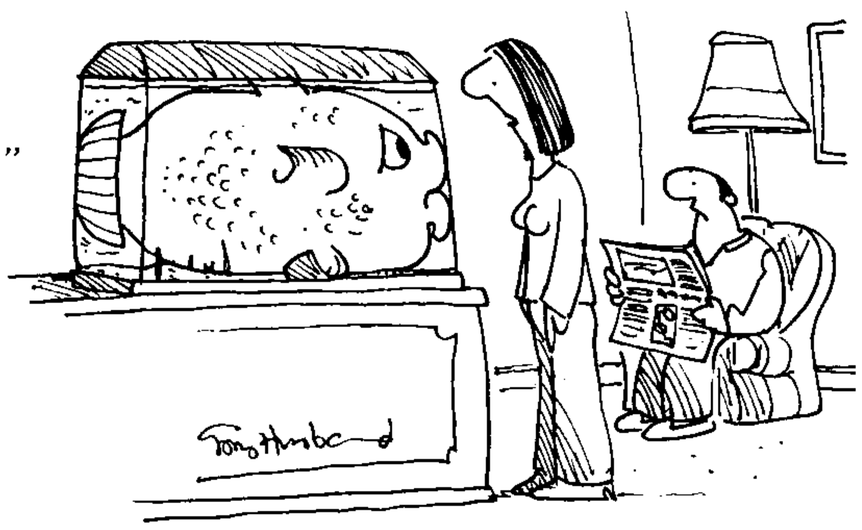
There have been fears that Britain would continue to hang on to the control of key British institutions, but Mr Blair was keen to reassure sceptics that this was not the case.

"All the vital areas have already been ceded to Brussels," he told reporters. "Parliament, the Law, the Police, Industry, Agriculture, Health and Safety and the shape of cucumbers are now effectively in the hands of non-local people.

"We may have to maintain a military presence in Britain," he continued, "but rest assured that it will be under the complete control of the European union.

"By the end of the year," he concluded, "we should pull out of Britain altogether."

"I think you've been over-feeding the fish"



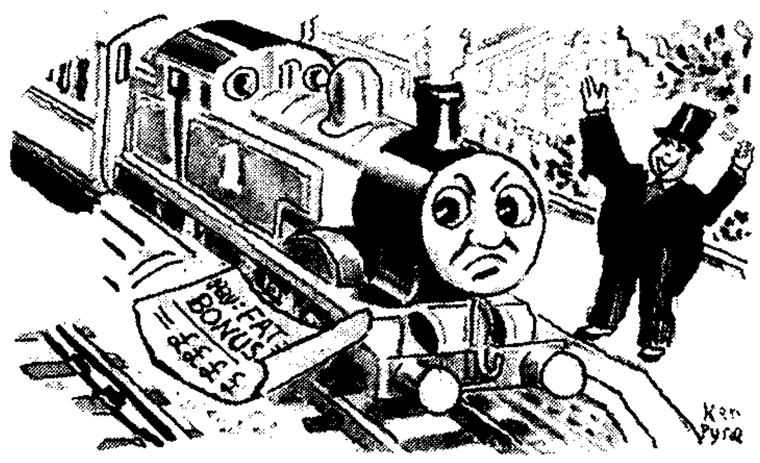
NEW HARRY POTTER FILM RE-BRANDED FOR AMERICAN MOVIE-GOERS

THOMAS THE PRIVATISED TANK ENGINE

BY THE REV. TAWDRY

THE Fat Controller was looking very happy with himself.

"Why are you so happy," asked Colin the Cancelled Train, "when you've made huge losses and failed all the punctuality targets?"



"Not *all* the targets," beamed the Fat Controller. "We can still make something arrive on time. Look – here comes my bonus!"

And at that moment a huge cheque came into the platform.

"Hurrah!" said the Fat Controller. "Now I can buy a car!"

NEXT WEEK: Ronald The Replacement Bus breaks down again.

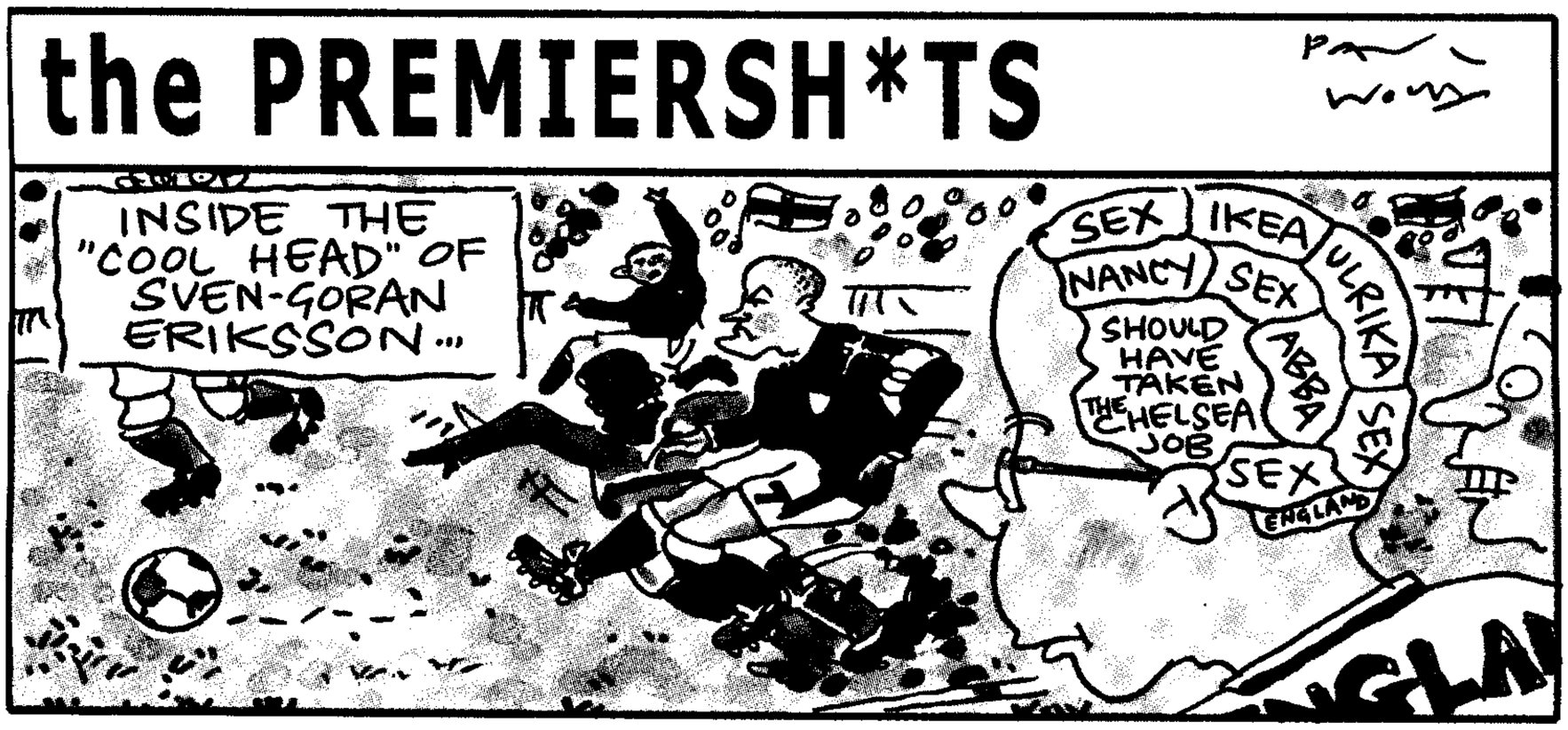
Exclusive To All Papers

AN APOLOGY Marks & Spencer

IN COMMON with other newspapers, we may have in the past given the impression that Marks & Spencer was a hopeless basket case, run by faceless bureaucrats and stuffed shirts, which desperately needed to be taken in hand by a talented retailer from outside the City old boys' club.

In light of recent events, we now recognise the company is a beloved national institution, second only to the Royal Family, which needs to be protected at all costs from appalling, jumped-up barrow boys. We apologise for any inconvenience caused... etc, etc.

the PREMIERSH*TS



THOSE SEBASTIAN COE 2012 OLYMPIC EVENTS IN FULL

- **The Sextathlon**
- **The Marathon Love Romp**
- **Ugandan Discus**
- **Canoedling**
- **Undressage**
- **Putting the it-about**

(We get the idea. Ed.)

HISTORIC WMD-DAY TRIBUTE
A facsimile reproduction of how the world's greatest invasion was reported at the time

Daily Mail

40 pence

FOR BUSH AND EMPIRE

60 Page Special

Friday 21 MARCH 2003

ALLIES ADVANCE – 'WEAPONS SURE TO BE FOUND SOON'

Premier's Historic Pledge

by W.M. Deedes

THE Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Winstony Blair, last night appeared on the balcony of Buckingham Palace to announce to cheering crowds (Sid and Doris Mandelson) that British troops, side by co-side with our American allies, are now advancing into Iraq on all fronts.

"Our boys are definitely on the verge of a major breakthrough in finding the enemy's secret weapons of mass destruction which are pointing directly at the heart of London and are ready to be launched within 45 years," said the Prime Minister.

Desert of the type Allied troops are reported to be advancing across

BAGHDAD OR BUST

THAT was the message from thousands of smiling Tommies as they drove over the border to Basra, to be greeted by delighted locals with showers of explosives and happy cries of "death to the infidel".

STATUE 'DEFINITELY DEAD'

by Our Special Correspondent
HUGH VERY-ROPEY

AS the first Allied correspondent to reach the heart of Iraq, I saw with my own eyes the scene where only a few hours before the hated dictator had been toppled from his plinth. There could be no doubt about it, the hated statue was dead, his reign of terror finally at an end.

HOW SADDAM WAS FOOLED

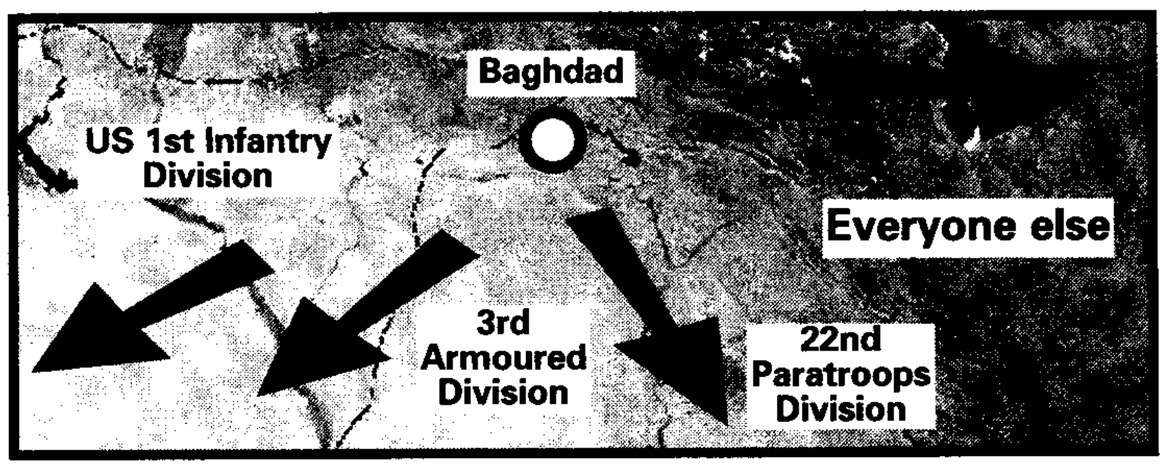
BY A brilliant masterstroke of counter-intelligence, Saddam was fooled into thinking that the Allied invasion would never come.

Night after night, President Bush had appeared on television, announcing that the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq could take place "at any time".

Saddam, believing Bush to be an idiot, ignored the warnings, assuming that Bush was having him on, and that America's real intention was to invade somewhere else, such as North Korea.

Reuters

How The Allies Will Escape From Iraq



Just Fancy That!

Did crossword compiler Archimedes of the Daily Telegraph give away vital clues which could have tipped off Saddam Hussein over the allies' top secret plans to invade his country?

Last Tuesday's 9 down, "A bra's confused in Iraq", gave the answer "Basra" – a clear hint to the Iraqi dictator as to where allied troops were heading for.

Another clue, 11 across, accurately predicted what would happen to Iraq after the allies had taken over the country.

The answer "total shambles" so worried Anglo-American intelligence chiefs that they seriously considered calling the whole invasion off.

DON'T MISS

THE MOUSETRAP

by A. Christie

NOW IN ITS 90TH YEAR!

ST MARTIN'S THEATRE

"It will come in handy, Corporal, if they drop those weapons of mass destruction on us!"

PIGEONS WILL FIND BIN LADEN

THE BBC last night revealed that teams of highly-trained pigeons are being dropped behind enemy lines, in order to sniff out the world's most hated man, Osama bin Liner.

"The government is confident that the Pigeon Force will root out Al Qaeda and destroy it for ever," said a War Office spokesman.

WILL INVASION AFFECT HOUSE PRICES?

THERE was concern last night at the Treasury at the prospect of the Allied invasion causing a fall in house prices, leading to a collapse in morale on the home front *(cont. p. 94)*

THAT BECKHAM PRE-EURO 2004 PRESS CONFERENCE SUMMED UP

"The allegations against me are scurrilous, ludicrous, shocking and lots of other words that almost, but not quite, mean 'false'"

SINGALONGA POSTAL VOTE WITH POSTMAN FAT!

♫ Postman Fat, Postman Fat
Postman Fat should be given the sack,
Early in the morning, just as it is dawning
On everyone that he is completely incompetent.

EXCLUSIVE TO THE DAILY MIRROR

PAUL BURRELL SAYS SOME-THING OF VERY LITTLE INTEREST TO ANYONE

MIRROR readers were today scratching their heads in astonishment, trying to understand why Paul Burrell saying something of very little interest to anyone deserves to be on the front page.

Could it have something to do with the fact Piers Morgan paid him so much money that they're forced to put any rubbish he says on the front page in the desperate hope that they might sell a few more papers?

We don't know. But at least by asking this question, we've filled up a few more column inches.

♥ Lonely Hearts

LADY journalist, 60 going on 25, enjoys good company, fine wines and buying shoes, shortly back on the market following the imprisonment of her husband, WLTM very rich international tycoon with GSOH and SVOI (Sound Views On Israel). Private jet optional, but must have Manhattan penthouse, English country house and Florida hideaway. Please apply enclosing photograph of recent bank statement to 'Babs', PO Box 800. ♥

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH Friday, June 11, 2004

Letters *to the Editor*

SIR – The whole nation will have been outraged by press reports that the captain of the England cricket team, a Mr Vaughan, was given permission to leave the field of play in the event of his lady wife giving birth during the match. No doubt the cause of this absurd ruling lies with our friends in Brussels, which is yet another reason for supporting the UK Independence Party. I well recall a match in India between the Maharajah of Napaul's XI and a team representing the local business community, the Boxwallahs. When the captain of the Boxwallahs, a Mr Vijay Hatterjee-Singh, was at the crease, on 36 not out, news was brought to him that his house was on fire, his cow had fallen into the Ganges and his wife had been set upon by a band of marauding muggers. As the umpire, I very properly ruled that he should not be allowed to leave the field until he had completed his innings, in accordance with Law 42.6(c) laid down by the game's governing body, the Marylebone Cricket Club. To his great credit, Hatterjee-Singh remained at the wicket and went on to score an unbeaten 378. He fully deserved the excellent turnout at his wife's funeral the next day, but alas his cow was never seen again. One cannot envisage the henpecked Mr Vaughan displaying such admirable stoicism in the face of adversity!

Sir H. Gussett
Dunbowlin, Trescothick, Cornwall

Kids' Etiquette Today
I'M NOT EATIN' THIS SHIT!
WHY DON'T YOU EAT WIV YOR (SIC) HANDS LIKE EVERYONE ELSE?
MENU
KIDS
HE HASN'T QUITE MADE UP HIS MIND YET
AT LEAST THEY'RE BURNING OFF THE CALORIES
KIDS STUFF
SO YOU'RE HIS PARENTS! I WAS JUST THINKING WHAT A SMASHING LITTLE CHAP HE IS.
IS IT TRUE THAT YOU SAID 'SSSSH' TO THIS LITTLE LAD?
MORE PEPPER?
KIDS' EATING AREA
HEATH

ELECTION 2004

How you won't vote on 10 June, because you can't be bothered

Voting paper for European, Local and Mayoral Elections, 10 June 2004

Neasden Central Ward of the South-East Euro-Region

(A) Statement by Elector

All voters must fill in this section.

I ..... *(fill in name)* am the person to whom this voting paper was originally addressed, even though it had to be left with the lady at 81b across the road because, by the time the postman arrived, I was at work / down the social / claiming my benefit/in the pub.

(B) Witness Statement

I ..... *(fill in name)*, the woman across the street, certify that the person named in the Statement by Elector is himself, or possibly his brother who looks very like him, it's uncanny. The voter has satisfied me as to his identity and has asked me over for a sherry to say thank you.

(C) Witness to the Witness

I ..... *(fill in name)* was just walking down the street minding my own business when I was stopped by this couple asking me to witness their marriage or something of the sort, which I was duly happy to do although, strictly between ourselves, I think they'd been at the sherry.

(D) Health & Safety Disclaimer

Before proceeding to cast your vote, please complete the following declaration that you are (a) over 18; (b) not suffering from any contagious disease, such as Meningitis B, Hepatitis A, Vitamin C; (c) not intending to sue the Electoral Committee for any injury which may be sustained by filling in this form, e.g. tennis elbow, repetitive strain injury, death by boredom.

(E) The Act of Voting

You are now ready to move on to the solemn act of recording your vote(s) for the candidate(s) of your choice. IMPORTANT: Remember that you have only ONE vote, except in elections for the Greater London Assembly, where you have three (or is it the other way round?)

List of Candidates in full

Read carefully through this list of candidates, making sure that you do not confuse the names of individual candidates with those standing under the 'party list' system. If you have any problems understanding this, please do not hesitate to contact our Helpline via our call centre in Madras. Our trained staff will then instruct you in how to record your vote for Mrs Gandhi.

1	**British Union Of Democratic Fascists** 1. Conrad Blackshirt 2. A. Cabbie 3. Sir Oswald Mosley	
2	**No To GM Pro-Windfarm Party** 1. Lord Melchett 2. Sir Jonathan Porridge 3. Prince of Wales 4. Sally Green	
3	**Liberal Democrat Pro-Cycle Lanes And EU Constitution Party** 1. Simon Servile 2. Polly Technic 3. Ron Beard	
4	**Conservatives Putting Losing First And Saying Yes And No To Europe** 1. C. Dracula 2. O. Letslose 3. Beano Boris	
5	**The Saddam Hussein Respect The Moustache Alliance** 1. G. Galloway 2. P. Spart 3. K. Loon	
6	**Pisces** Do not attempt to fill in any forms today if you are a Piscean. It could have unforeseen consequences! You may be approached by a woman across the road asking for your help. Be generous with the sherry!	
7	**Labour Let's Pretend There Isn't An Election Going On Party** 1. Patsy Jacket 2. Suzi Anglepoise 3. Debbie Lampshade	
8	**FCUKIP** 1. R. Kilroy-Sacked 2. W. Really-Smugg 3. Dame Joan Harpie-Collins	
9	**INDEPENDENT** 1. Ted Nutter	

When you have completed the above form, fold it carefully along the line marked A-B and fold this again along the line B-C, making sure that no one sees you performing this secret action.

If they do, you will be liable on summary conviction to a fine of £500.

Then take the folded voting form, ensuring that the address of your regional returning officer is uppermost in the transparent window, and place the form carefully in the waste disposal receptacle provided for this purpose.

CONGRATULATIONS!!!!

You have now become the first person in Britain to complete the 2004 voting form. You have thus become eligible for a fabulous prize, which might be any of the following: 1) Electric toaster; 2) Midweek break in the Ramada Inn, Neasden; 3) A year's subscription to The Spectator.

RING NOW on our premium-rate line 09860-511-511 (£12 a second) to ascertain which of these prizes you haven't won.

If you do not complete this form (or indeed receive it) your vote will not be wasted. It will be counted as a vote for the Labour Party.

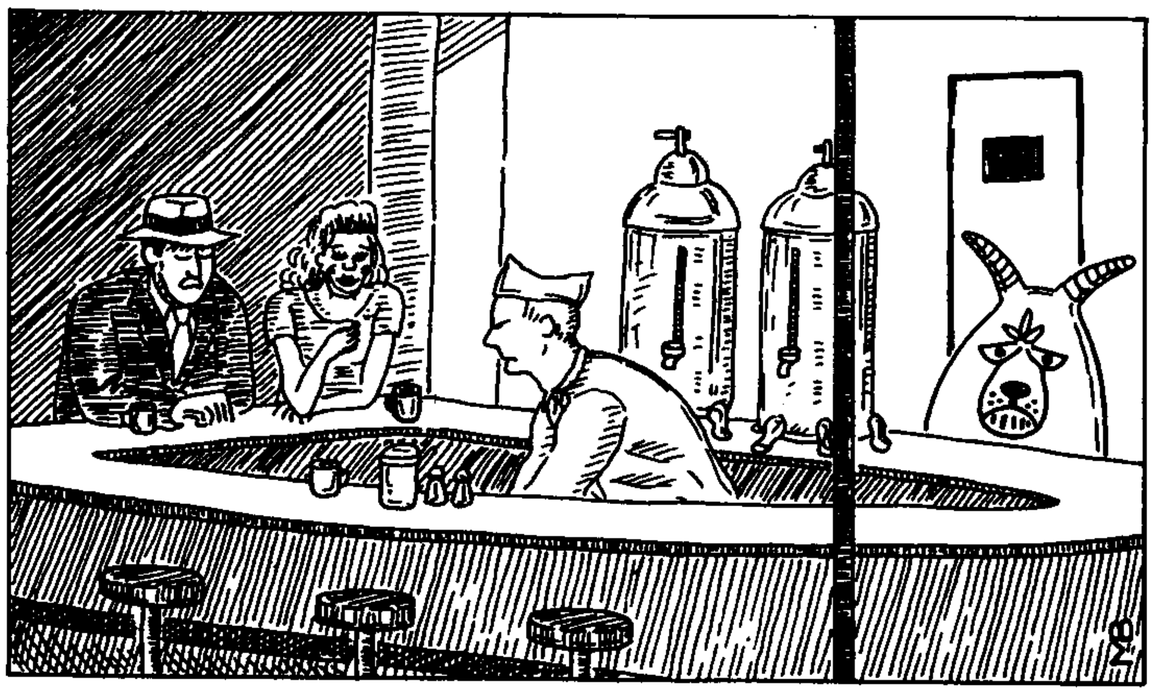
TOP PRIEST'S SENSATIONAL KISS-AND-TELL REVELATIONS

I Told Charles, 'Make An Honest Woman Of Camilla'

Continuing Our Exclusive Serialisation Of The Scandalous Memoirs Of **George Carey**, former Archbishop of Canterbury

AS PART of my pastoral remit, I felt it my duty to lend my assistance over the vexed problem of the relationship between His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales, and his longtime companion Mrs Parker-Bowles. On the one hand, they were clearly a loving couple in a long-term stable relationship. On the other, Prince Charles would one day be the Head of the Church, and he was a divorced man who might marry a divorced woman. This was a tricky one which I never managed to resolve.

Tomorrow: Gay bishops – another tricky one I didn't manage to resolve; falling congregations – yet another tricky one *(see above)*



Hopper: The Lost Self-Portrait

LIVINGSTONE 'SET FOR RE-ELECTION'

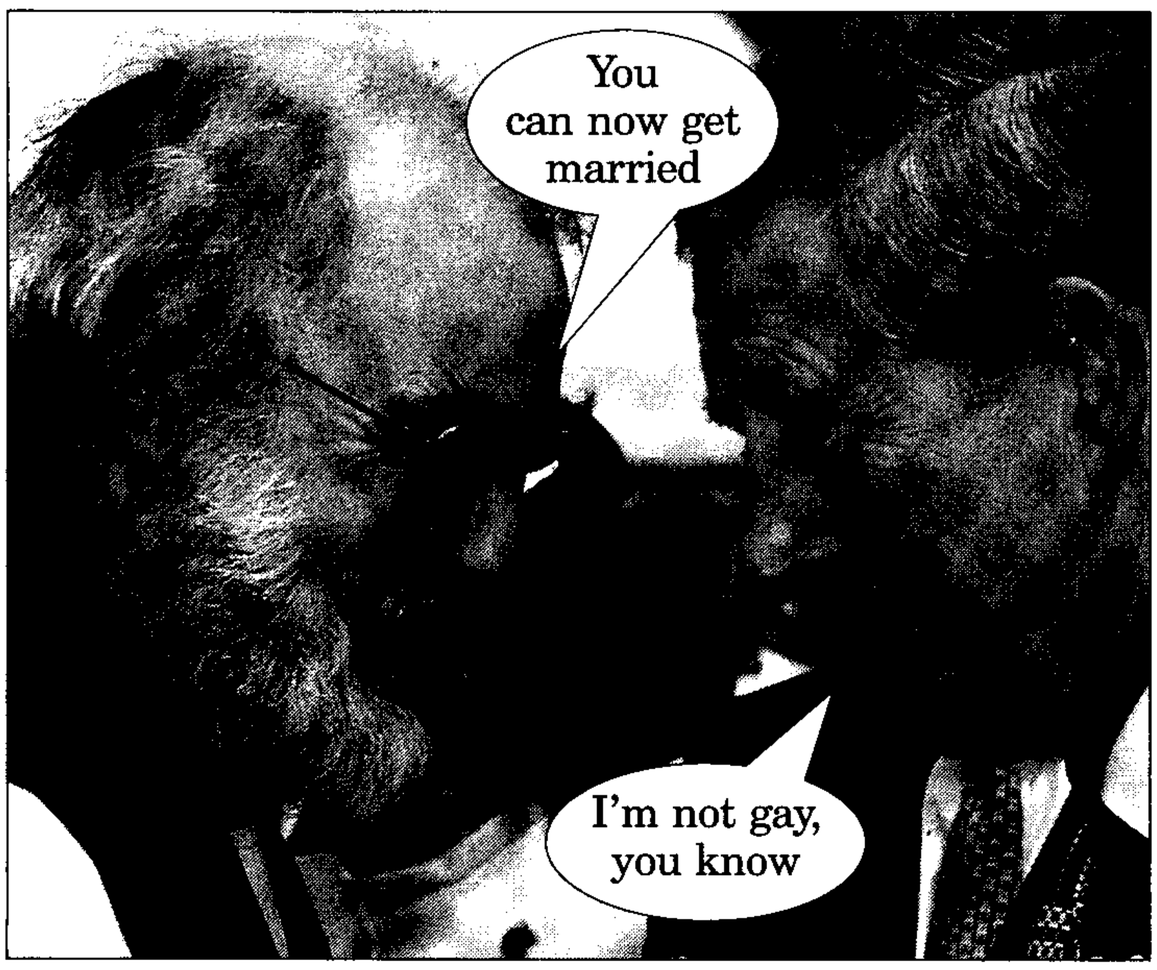
by Our London Correspondent **Simon Whohes**

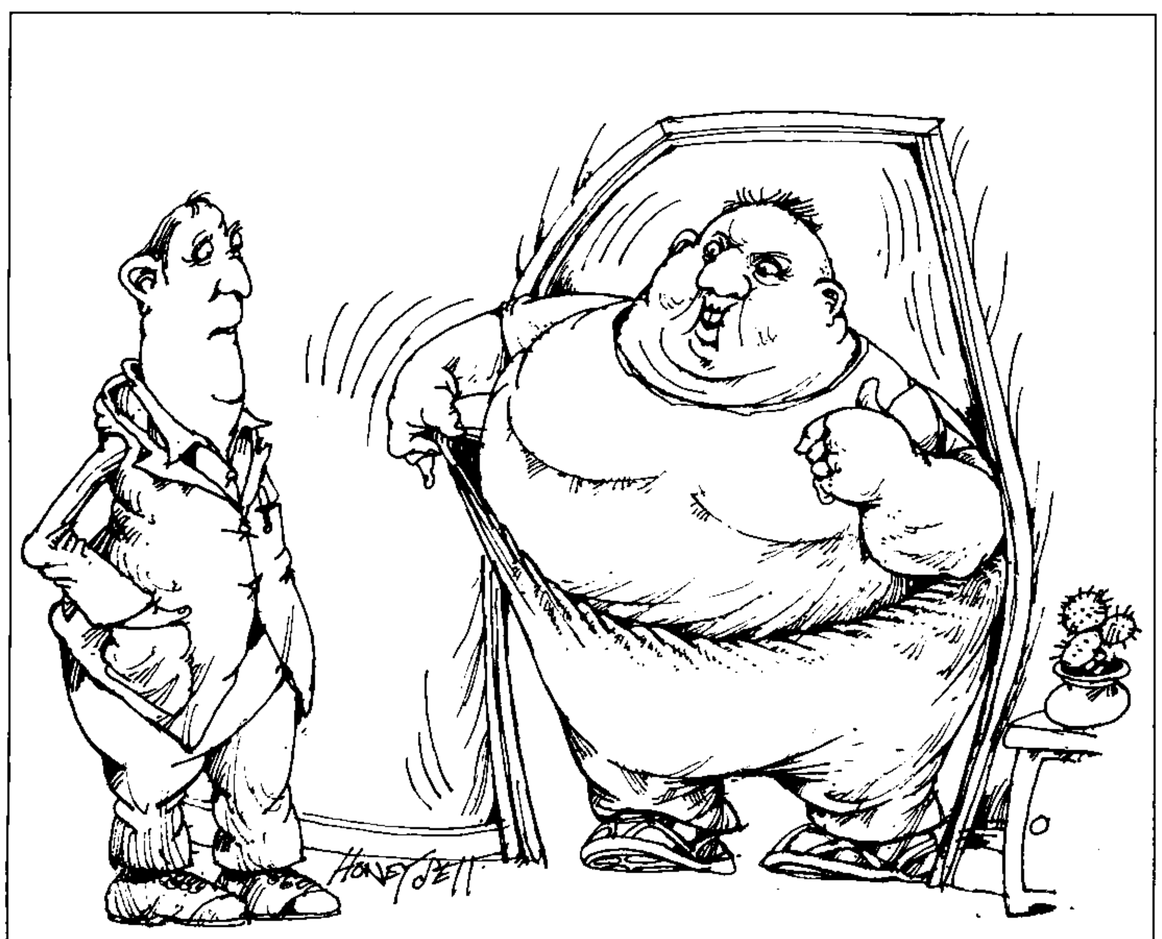
LATEST opinion polls suggest that the official Labour candidate for Mayor, Ken Livingstone, is going to beat his nearest challenger, the maverick independent incumbent Mayor, Ken Livingstone, easily.

"I believe that it's my duty as a member of the Labour party to drive this dangerous loner from office," Mr Livingstone told reporters. "For me, the final straw came when Livingstone actually called the Prime Minister a war criminal."

However, the sitting independent, Mayor Ken Livingstone, hit back at Livingstone, describing his opponent as a typical New Labour toady doing Number 10's bidding.

CHURCH LIFTS BAN





"And I've also got elasticated doorways"

GARDENERS' QUESTION TIME

With Old John Prescott

1st Caller: What is the best thing to do with my lawn?

Old John: This is the time of year for getting rid of all that awful grass and putting in some housing instead.

1st Caller: But, John, I don't really want a house in my back garden.

Old John: Fair enough. Then put in a block of flats. They come up nicely and they have the added advantage of being perennial. In fact, you'll never get rid of them.

2nd Caller: Hello, John. I'm having trouble with weeds.

Old John: Me, too. They keep saying we don't need millions of houses all over the countryside.

2nd Caller: So, how do you deal with them?

Old John: I ignore them completely. I just get on with it and start digging those foundations.

3rd Caller: What sort of plant would you recommend for an English country garden?

Old John: Heavy industrial plant, concrete mixers, earth movers, bulldozers and *(cont. 94 MHz)*

'SWEET AND CRISP MANUFACTURERS TARGET CHILDREN' SHOCK

THE WORLD was said to be stunned by a shocking report just out, which claims that companies who make sweets and crisps deliberately target children when it comes to marketing their products.

On Other Pages

Pope admits to Catholic leanings **2**
Fish goes swimming **5**

DIARY

JANET STREET-PORTER: MY LIFE

Tough shit.

That's basically what I thought when I came out of my mother's womb to hear her screaming her bloody head off.

Why wouldn't the old cow shut the fuck up, that's what I wanted to know.

I'd only been alive a few minutes, and everyone wanted to see me, not her. And there she was, making the most terrible scene. She obviously couldn't bear the thought that I had arrived on the scene to upstage her. So I resolved there and then to clear the fuck out of her life the first moment I possibly could.

Being born was great. But the initial excitement soon wore off.

All the time I was a baby my mother did her level best to make me feel inferior by dressing me in baby clothes rather than the red and yellow striped PVC trousers and bright orange skintight sleeveless polo neck I'd have looked so much better in. Honestly, talk about what a bloody cow.

And whenever I wanted to go anywhere she'd just stick me in a pram to increase my sense of humiliation and make me feel small. Why couldn't she understand that I was better than that, that one day I would see it as like totally normal basically to be riding in a stretch limo with my friends top superstar Elton John and the lovely David Furnish and talking besottedly about cutting-edge conceptual art and the very latest in modern music.

My parents and I had nothing in common, no conversation, no small talk, nothing. Just imagine my horror when aged five I found they'd booked me into a primary school. How bloody dare they. "Don't you know who I am?" I said, but they wouldn't bloody listen, would they, no way.

The Perivale Primary School was something rotten. The uniform was a total turn-off, the teachers had no like sense of style whatsoever and the service was truly appalling. In the school breaks they'd expect us to drink this unpleasantly lukewarm free school milk. Ugh! Why would I bother with drinking that muck when in just a few years time I could expect to be drinking a full range of exotic rum-based cocktails with my good friends The Pet Shop Boys at Park Lane's famous Metropolitan Bar.

Our family holidays were rotten too. Who wants to end up in a caravan in some crappy resort, specially when it's fucking raining outside. Not me and that's for sure.

I tried to inject some fun into the proceedings by letting go of the brake and pushing our cheap and nasty family Vauxhall over the cliff but that turned out to be just one more thing they didn't approve of, didn't it?

Talk about whingeing. "If you push another car over the cliff my girl I'll teach you a lesson you'll never forget!" ranted my father, in natural bullying mode, "And you can put that knife down while you're about it young lady."

My father never failed to make me feel inferior. Once I was putting on my false eyelashes and my fluorescent mini to go out for a night on the town and he stopped me at the door saying "And where may I ask do you think you're going to dressed like that young lady?"

I informed him that I was going down The Easy Beat club in Berwick Street to hang out with the groovy crowd. "But you're not yet seven years old," he said, blocking my way in his cheap drab dowdy grey suit.

"Shut the bloody fuck up!" I responded. He was such a bloody misery, always whingeing about something or other. All in all I guess I was just too sophisticated for him and my equally dreary mother.

But soon I was dyeing my hair with the new wonder lightener Poly Blond and scoring drinks with fanciable blokes down the Tottenham Court Road.

This was the dawn of the Sixties and it was lined up to be so totally a happening decade. For starters, there was super-trendy alternative music with Tommy Steele and Frank Ifield. I once met Frank Ifield down the Roxy and might have given him a shag but got bored after a few minutes and decided to settle for a hand-job.

Then there was cutting-edge comedy with Arthur Askey and Cyril Fletcher. I didn't half fancy a shag with little Arthur Askey, but even though I was totally besotted once he'd told me yet another of his tedious jokes I got bored shitless and dumped him. And the Black and White Minstrels weren't much better at shagging either, but that's another story. Would I like to fly in their beautiful, their beautiful balloooooooon? No I bloody wouldn't, guys, so why not fuck off.

On the radio one day halfway through Two-Way Family Favourites, I heard that President Kennedy had been shot in Detroit. Typical! He'd just gone and interrupted my favourite record. I had just been thinking of going to America, and now he goes and gets himself assassinated. Men! I mean, talk about upstaging.

Anyway, the assassination was quite interesting at the beginning but the initial excitement soon wore off.

Carnaby Street in the Sixties was the only place to be. It totally swang, and I was like right in the centre of it. I once met top Italian film director Antonio Knee who was working on his totally happening film Blow Job. He wanted a shag, only he was too fat for my taste, but I gave him one anyway, behind what used to be Pontings Department Store just off Kensington High Street.

One day I got married to a man called whatever but by the evening the initial excitement had worn off. There was nothing on television that night – these were the days before I had totally stamped the medium with my iconoclastic and innovatory approach – so I met up with a Dutchman but after a bit of squidging about on the mattress he turned out to be quite boring too.

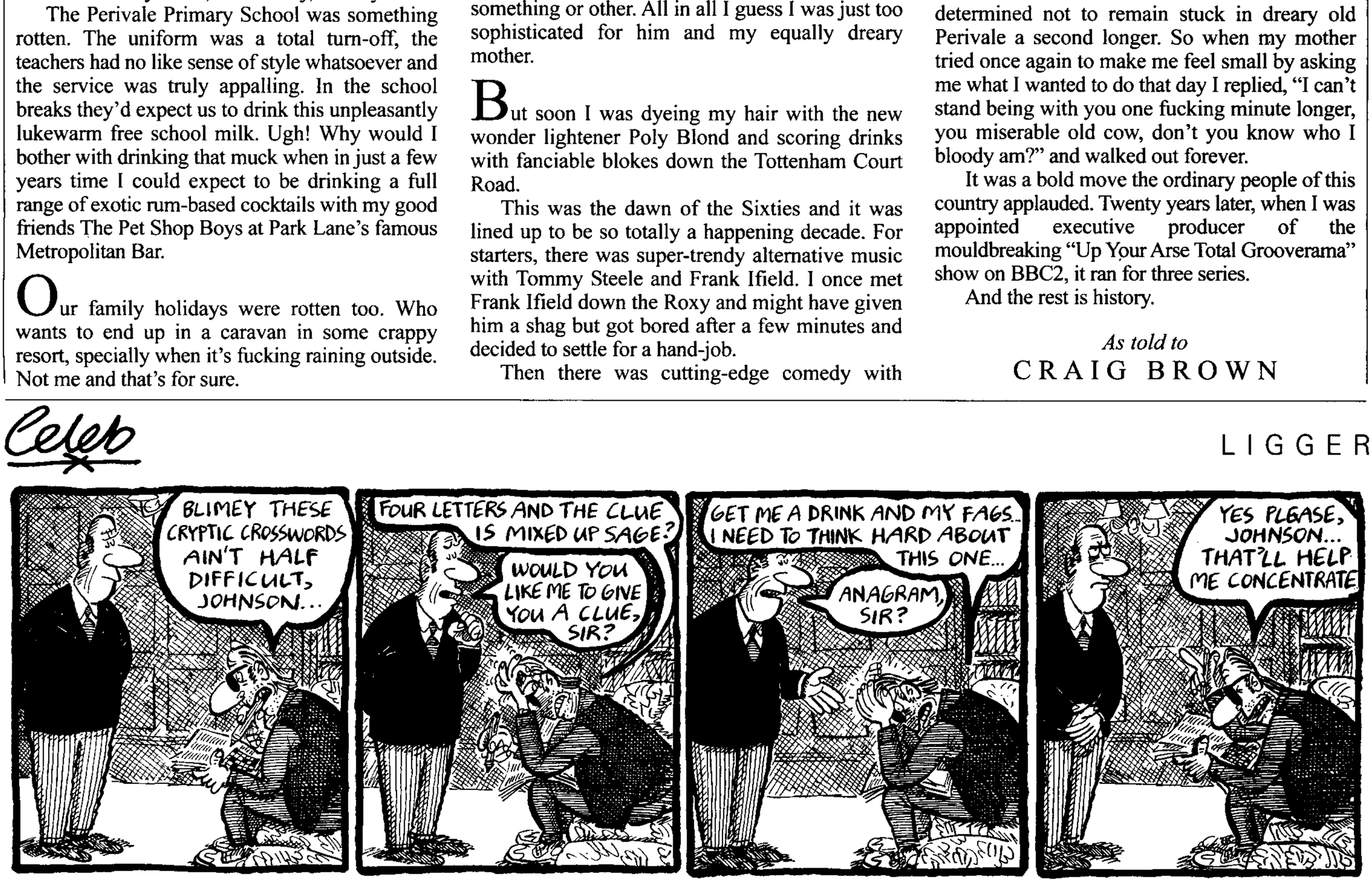
I wanted new music, new art, new things, new experiences. I wanted to do everything once before the initial excitement wore off – and I was determined not to remain stuck in dreary old Perivale a second longer. So when my mother tried once again to make me feel small by asking me what I wanted to do that day I replied, "I can't stand being with you one fucking minute longer, you miserable old cow, don't you know who I bloody am?" and walked out forever.

It was a bold move the ordinary people of this country applauded. Twenty years later, when I was appointed executive producer of the mouldbreaking "Up Your Arse Total Grooverama" show on BBC2, it ran for three series.

And the rest is history.

As told to

CRAIG BROWN


BLIMEY THESE CRYPTIC CROSSWORDS AIN'T HALF DIFFICULT, JOHNSON...
FOUR LETTERS AND THE CLUE IS MIXED UP SAGE?
WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO GIVE YOU A CLUE, SIR?
GET ME A DRINK AND MY FAGS.. I NEED TO THINK HARD ABOUT THIS ONE...
ANAGRAM, SIR?
YES PLEASE, JOHNSON... THAT'LL HELP ME CONCENTRATE

Literary Review

Hay fever

Transmission
Hari Kunzru
(Hamish Hamilton, £12.99)

THE Hay Literary Festival offered its usual quota of silver-locked eminences sedulously imparting their wisdom to the impressionable young.

Lord Bragg descanted on the English language. Lord Pilger spoke on – well, is it really necessary at this point in world history to explain what Lord Pilger spoke on? Pride of place, though, in this procession of frisky sixty and seventysomethings was given to John Updike, enticed at vast expense from his Yankee lair to be fawned over by the Guardian, featured in a Channel 4 cosying-up session by Ian McEwan (Mr U reciprocated this regard by name-checking *Atonement*) and, from the angle of his enraptured English audience, offer a message of hope and consolation.

Briefly, Mr U charmed us all by declaring that it was OK to stop worrying about the kind of books we all wrote and read, or as the Guardian cringingly put it: "He earned the gratitude of British writers when he assured them that they no longer have an awe-stricken inferiority complex about US novelists."

Iris Murdoch and Muriel Spark (the list of Mr U's homegrown faves suggested he wasn't terrifically au fait with contemporary Britlit) were just dandy, didn't you know? More important, British writing had been revivified and reinvented by all those bright young ethnic people "bringing the empire back to Britain". In particular he had been highly impressed by a novella written by Hanif Kureishi.

Well bless my transatlantic soul sir! Mr Updike, you must come here again! One doesn't have to be too deeply imbricated in the, uh, contemporary literary scene to realise that, as arguments run, this is simply the most frightful rubbish, whose principal propositions stand up for slightly less time than the average alcoholic in the Guinness brewery.

To take the first. No current British writer worries about his or her inferiority to Yankee competition for the simple reason that the American novel has been more or less washed up since the early 1990s – old stagers such as Roth (*American Pastoral* notwithstanding) and Mailer (and Mr U himself, I fear) sunk in torpor, newcomers like the Dave Eggers-fathered McSweeney's crowd more interested in back-slapping group promotion.

As for the second, all those darling young "ethnic" talents – Zadie (Smith), Monica (Ali) and the others – come to show the palsied natives how it's done; well, stripped down to its fundamentals the phenomenon consists of a bunch of very well-educated (Ms Smith went to Cambridge, Ms Ali to Oxford) and personable young folk, each with a contacts book a yard long, all working within an identifiable mainstream tradition and bringing to English literature on the one hand a faint yet marketable exoticism, and on the other much that the media finds exquisitely promotable.

Does anyone seriously think Zadie Smith would have gone quite so far had she not looked like a cadet member of the Pointer Sisters? As Yasmin Alibai-Brown suggested, how would *Brick Lane* have fared in the bestseller charts had its author worn a burkah and chaired the Shoreditch Islamic Sisters Against the Great Satan Bush Coalition?

Step forward to join this spangled and wealthy company Mr Hari Kunzru, for whose sparkling debut *The Impressionist* Penguin forked out something in the region of seven figures. Mr K features a lot in the public prints, declining the Mail on Sunday's John Llewellyn Rhys award on account of that organ's treatment of the asylum seeker question, turning up in last week's Independent on Sunday to reveal that the building he would most like to tear down is, gasp, Buckingham Palace ("It's a rather box-like house with bad associations.") Lawks! So this is what Mr Updike means about "with the empire coming back to Britain you have a lot of different kinds of voices". No, actually. You have a lot of very similar voices saying more or less the same thing.

Like its predecessor, *Transmission* features an Indian abroad, in this case one Arjun Mehta, a computer gadget-boy with a Bollywood fixation who sets out to conquer the US techno-industry. Lots of culture clash, computer viruses (ah yes, the double resonance of that title) breathless reports from the frontiers of the new civilisation, plus pointed contrasts with the solidity of the old and some necessarily hot sex.

"English" attitudes get satirised in the person of a marketing executive named Guy Swift. In the end Arjun brings down his Bollywood babe, but quite what this has to do with reinventing the British novel's sense of itself I'll leave to the old pundit in his literary festival tent.

British fiction's real blood transfusion in recent years has come courtesy of the new English regionalism. Any one who wants to see what local writing has been up to in the bleak territory beneath that New York/London/Bombay suspension bridge should check out Carol Birch's *Turn Again Home* (Virago £6.99) and Julia Darling's *The Taxi-Driver's Daughter* (Penguin £6.99). Never mind that it suits London medialand and travelling literary princes to pretend otherwise.

The Guardian Hay Festival began yesterday, with the palaeontologist Richard Fortey's illustrated lecture on the Earth's last four billion years; it ends next Sunday, with a performance by the Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain.

The Grauniad

Master and Commandeer

FANS of the late Patrick O'Brian, who died on new year's day 2000, must have been delighted by the recent announcement that a new Aubrey-Maturin novel will soon be published. "It's a great joy," gushed his London literary agent, Vivien Green.

But they may be rather less overjoyed when they discover that the work in question is only a few chapters from a rough draft, amounting to about 60 pages – though the publisher is padding it out by printing a facsimile of the manuscript on one side and the printed text on the other.

O'Brian's stepson, Nikolai Tolstoy, is appalled. "He would not have wanted this to be published in this form," he told the *Daily Telegraph* last month. "It is crude and unfinished." His opinion is shared by the six beneficiaries of O'Brian's will – Tolstoy's four children plus his sister's two sons. So who is responsible for defying their wishes?

Step forward the Hon Mark Bridges of Farrer & Co, principal executor and trustee of the O'Brian estate, who also happens to be personal solicitor to the Queen. Immediately after the author's death the unfinished MS was found in his room at Trinity College, Dublin, and his Irish lawyer David Beattie passed it on to Bridges in London. Yet in his executor's report dated 30 September 2000, Bridges informed the beneficiaries of the will that "other than bank accounts and royalties there were no other assets of the estate in the United Kingdom".

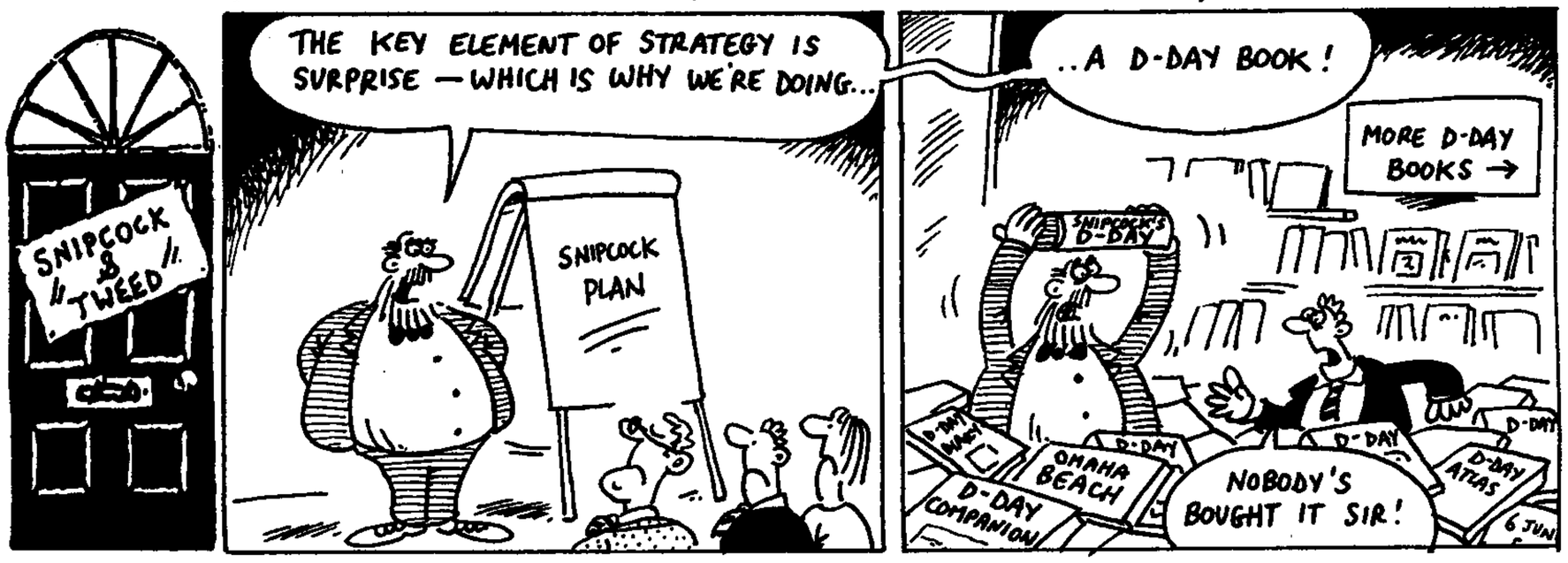
Tolstoy, who knew of the MS's existence, wrote asking Bridges what had happened to it, but received no reply. It was not until 13 December 2002 that the executor finally admitted to Tolstoy that he had it. Although there was no apology or explanation for having concealed it from the beneficiaries, Bridges did say that he had every reason to believe that it wouldn't be published. Now, however, it transpires that he has secretly negotiated a deal to publish after all, despite opposition of the family.

He may have other shocks in store for them. For Bridges has also obtained O'Brian's diaries, which were borrowed by Vivien Green six months before his death and later passed on to the executor. "Publishing the diaries would have horrified my stepfather," says Tolstoy, who has read them. "He wrote to me in 1998 and said 'when I die please go straight to the house and burn my private papers'."

In a report sent to the six beneficiaries on 18 May this year, Bridges claims that "the executors own both the manuscript and the copyright" in the unfinished novel and the diary, but adds that "there is no current intention of either publishing or disposing of the diaries".

Since he previously gave a similar assurance about the novel, O'Brian's family are understandably fearful. "Poor Patrick, he was just like Jack Aubrey in business affairs," Tolstoy says. "He once said to me that if you hire lawyers you then need to hire other lawyers to keep an eye on them."

The alternative, of course, is to sack them. O'Brian's heirs are now so disgruntled they are on the point of making a formal legal application for Bridges and his fellow-executor, a barrister called Giles Curtis-Raleigh, to be replaced as trustees of the estate.



Books & Bookmen

■ CURIOUS, was it not, how critical reaction to Peter Parker's 900-page life of gay icon Christopher Isherwood should split so emphatically on party lines?

Almost to a man heterosexual male reviewers (Humphrey Carpenter, Jonathan Bate, Paul Willetts) seemed to feel the treatment was way too long and the subject's achievement rather doubtful. No such qualms, though,

FIRST DRAFTS

Nick Hornby

for gay appraisers of the work, who positively queued up to applaud ("a study which could justify the art of biography on its own" – Philiip Hensher), salute Isherwood's work for the cause (our man's "powerful sex drive seems never to have been hampered by doubts, fears or moral confusions" as Alan Hollinghurst crisply paraphrased his sexual antics) and even to suggest – Hollinghurst again – that 900 pages wasn't really enough given what Parker had had to leave out.

A (so far as one can establish) solitary female voice, that of Carole Angier, could be heard in the *Literary Review* complaining that Isherwood's misogny would pretty much see off any lady readers.

■ READERS of Jeremy Lewis's Independent review of Philip Ziegler's recent biography of the publisher and man of letters Rupert Hart-Davis may have been struck by its unusually sour tone.

Having anatomised the subject's apparent failings, crustiness, out-dated literary opinions and so on, Lewis concluded his review by wondering whether Hart-Davis was really worth a book.

It can now be revealed that in the period immediately following Hart-Davis's death in 1999, Lewis made several efforts to talk himself up as the official biographer, only for the deceased's family to decide Ziegler ought to be given the job.

■ *DESPITE his spell inside, is Lord Brocket still a cad at heart?*

Shortly after he emerged from the Australian jungle and I'm A Celebrity, Get Me Out Of Here! the Curtis Brown literary agency announced that it had sold Brocket's autobiography to Simon & Schuster for a significant sum. Nothing wrong with that: cashing in on transient fame (or infamy) is the name of the memoir game nowadays. The problem is that Curtis Brown had long ago turned down Brocket's manuscript and it had been taken on by another agent, Jeffrey Simmons.

Simmons is understood to have given the manuscript a major edit before submitting it to several publishers (including S&S), all of whom praised the book – then titled My Kingdom for a Horse *– but said it was of limited commercial potential. When the Celebrity TV offer came in, Brocket told Simmons to hold off on further submissions until the series had been broadcast.*

The next thing anyone knew, S&S had bought Call Me Charlie: the autobiography of Lord Brocket *from the agency that had originally rejected the publicity-hungry peer. Neither Curtis Brown nor Brocket emerges with much credit from the episode, but it is still considered form to dispense with an agent in writing before seeking alternative representation.*

■ MORE confusion at Grove Dictionary of Music (see Eyes passim) where editor-in-chief Laura "Fubsie" Macy has told contributors their "continuing participation is essential... to keep Grove Music Online up to date, without compromising scholarly integrity".

Fubsie then invites them to send revisions and updates to their contributions where necessary. All fine and dandy... but there are three problems.

Firstly, many Grove contributors have not received the letter while a surprising number of people with little or no connection to the dictionary have. Secondly, there is no indication whether contributors will be paid for the extra work (this is galling since many of the amendments result from errors made by Furbie's inexperienced editors and because many contributors are still waiting to be paid for their original efforts). And finally, mistakes pointed out by contributors at the time of publication in 2001 have yet to be corrected. So much for "scholarly integrity".

■ RAPACIOUS academic publisher Taylor & Francis (see *Eye* 1100) has cemented its reputation as the leading exponent of corporate employee-bashing in British publishing.

Now, however, even they may have gone too far. The galley-slaves are in open mutiny and may soon call the first major strike in the publishing industry for years.

T&F announced in March that it was closing the book company's long-established head office in New Fetter Lane, London, and relocating to Milton Park, a soulless industrial park near Didcot, Oxfordshire. By happy coincidence many of the company's senior management already live in Oxfordshire and would now have a pleasant short drive to work in their expensive company cars. However, although the NUJ managed to secure a decent relocation package for staff moving to the new office, few employees wanted to replace the delights of Fleet Street and St Paul's for an industrial estate off the M40.

While they were still pondering their future, chief executive David Smith revealed a further exciting development. In a gleeful email to staff, he announced that T&F was merging with specialist publisher Informa to create a new behemoth called, with stunning originality, T&F Informa. The merger, which came into effect in May, was treated with scepticism by City analysts but led to plenty of fatcat bonuses for the new company's directors and shareholders while leaving employees wondering where the proposed cost savings would come from.

The answer soon became obvious, with the announcement that the company would be terminating the current house agreement with the NUJ. The agreement, which had been in place for 20 years, defined and protected employees' terms and conditions, and was generally seen as one of the best in the publishing sector.

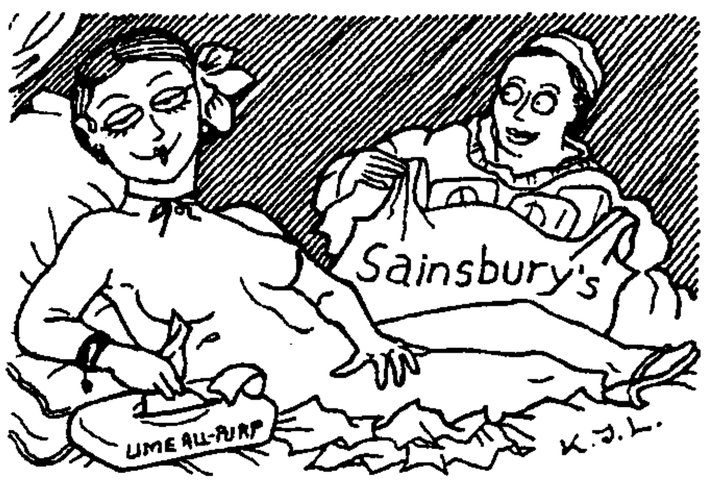
The proposal caused uproar. Despite attempts to intimidate them with threats of sackings and legal action, the staff have now balloted for industrial action. The results are expected very soon and if a strike ensues human resources director Simon Franklin may have to make himself redundant.

■ *A POLL showing that a third of Britons would like to emigrate compels a furious Frederick Forsyth to rush into print in the pages of the Daily Mail to defend this sceptr'd isle.*

"I have lived for extended residential periods in half a dozen lands," he writes. "But the sight that still brings a lump to my throat is the spectacle of those great cliffs of Dover that mark the gates of England."

Cry God for Harry, England and St George! What Freddy neglects to mention, however, is that at least some of his sojourns abroad – including a lengthy spell in Ireland – were undertaken for the purposes of avoiding British tax. How touchingly patriotic.

'Bookworm'



Pseuds Corner

Like all wipes, our Sainsbury's Lime All Purpose makes powerful appeals to our subconscious. The taste for hygiene we can come to later, but more immediately a part of its portfolio of potencies includes erotic and gustatory elements... Indeed, just feeling a fresh pouch of wipes is, for the imaginative consumer, an act with a quasi-sexual character. It is sensual and suggestive of pleasures to come. And the "peel and reseal" label, at first firmly attached, but then after persuasive ministrations, coquettishly giving way to reveal an unambiguously mandorla-shaped orifice giving on to a foaming interior... this apes the comings and goings of concealment and display that characterise the act of love [continues]

STEPHEN BAYLEY on the aesthetics of the wet-wipe, *Independent*

PITMAN – On 7th May, to POOEE (nee Gubbins) and SPENCER, a beautiful daughter, Ruby Rhapsody Panda, a sister for Mimi Magenta Poodle.

***Daily Telegraph* birth announcements**

The nuclear physicist Wolfgang Pauli used to say of imperfect theorems advanced him by incautious students, 'It's not even wrong!' suggesting that being wrong was, at least, in the same conceptual area as being right. Jordan's book is not even bad. It is, however, a history of contemporary Britain.

STEPHEN BAYLEY review *Being Jordan* *Observer*

This exquisite space [a shower] is a hidden mannerist configuration, telescopically condensed into this accomplished essay in modern domesticity.

ANDREW HOULTON
Architecture Today

Pseuds Corporate

The aim of this resource pack is to help organisations promote and implement the use of an HR Leadership Qualities Framework that describes those behaviours which enhance NHS HR capacity and capability to improve the patient experience. The resource pack will provide a 'thread' through the myriad of leadership and competence based initiatives which address not only HR capacity but also the HR capacity of line managers. It will achieve this through an emphasis on the practical application of this framework and the competencies described within highlighting their use in a range of HR and development processes.

Department of Health guidance document

CONTRIBUTORS: Mrs H.C. Bell, Peter Barnes, Allison Taylor, Juliet Blaxland, David Coleman.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

WHAT'S WATT IN EUROPE

ONE of the least publicised but more interesting parties in this month's European elections is Europa Transparant. It has 20 candidates seeking to be elected as MEPs from Holland; and its leader is Paul van Buitenen, whose revelations about corruption and nepotism in Europe's institutions led to the resignation of the entire European Commission in 1999.

Here in Britain a keen supporter of Mr van Buitenen is the *Eye*'s old chum Dougal Watt (see *Eyes* 1065, 1067 and 1078), a former official in the top European watchdog, the court of auditors.

The court has supreme powers of financial investigation and regulation over European institutions and its anti-fraud organisation, OLAF. Like Mr Watt, its officials are highly qualified (Mr Watt, an accountant, worked for a number of years at the national audit office) and are well placed to detect corruption. Yet in three cases in recent years, court officials who have complained of corruption have either been sacked or medically retired.

Dougal Watt

1. In 1987 Calvin Williams, another British-born court official, sent a telex to the then British prime minister Margaret Thatcher setting out allegations of corruption in the court. Williams was widely smeared as a bit of a nutter before being sacked and having his pension entitlement withdrawn.

2. In 1997 Dougal Watt became an official of the court. Like many others, he was surprised by the authorities' slack approach, especially towards the paid employment of top peoples' relatives. In April 2002 he wrote to the European parliamentary ombudsman setting out allegations of nepotism, sexual harassment and bad management. He sent copies to European MPs and staff of the court.

Like Mr Williams, Mr Watt also stood for election to the court's staff committee on the basis of his allegations, and like Mr Williams he was well supported. He got 205 votes, second highest of the 12 candidates. But the authorities took a different view of him. They put it around that he was, well, a bit of a nutter too.

His behaviour was even referred to the court's disciplinary board, which has five independent officials. They concluded that Mr Watt's whistle-blowing had to some extent been inspired by a desire to protect the European community's interests, and that his punishment for blowing the whistle should be limited to downgrading.

That conclusion did not satisfy the secretary-general of the court, Mr Michel Hervé. He reconvened the disciplinary board and told members they hadn't paid enough attention to the gravity of Mr Watt's misdemeanours. So the board met again — and stuck to its guns. In June last year, at a meeting in Luxembourg's Sheraton Hotel with M. Francois Colling, a member of the court of auditors, Mr Watt agreed to accept a formal reprimand for blowing the whistle in exchange for going back to his job. He thought the meeting and agreement were official. But two weeks later he was sacked.

3. Since his sacking another court auditor, a Frenchman, has also blown the whistle and sent an MEP a dossier of evidence of corruption and nepotism very similar to the allegations Mr Watt had made. The official reaction was that the third whistleblower was, well, also a bit of a nutter.

He was referred to the EU's medical service, with the claim that he was unfit for work. He promptly got an independent medical opinion that he was perfectly fit to work, but it did him no good. He was told that unless he took early retirement he would be compulsorily "medically retired". He chose the former. As Mr Watt says: "There are scenes like this in *The Gulag Archipelago*... It doesn't matter if you go public or go private with evidence of court corruption: you'll get gutted and stuffed."

In the year since his sacking Mr Watt has been surprised how often his allegations have been substantiated. Mrs Kalliopi Nikolaou, a Greek member of the court from 1996 to 2001 and the subject of several of Mr Watt's allegations, has been recommended by OLAF for prosecution, and her former assistant for disciplinary action.

Following Mr Watt's widespread allegations about the hiring of temporary staff, such recruitment has been outsourced and his objections to the system of "salary weighting" for top people have resulted in sharp deductions in the salaries of commissioners.

Nevertheless, like Mr Williams and the anonymous French whistleblower, Mr Watt is out of work, has no salary and no remedy short of ruinously expensive legal action. Last year he wrote to the House of Commons public accounts committee (PAC) and its chairman, Edward Leigh, Tory MP for Gainsborough, asking the committee "to secure a transnational public inquiry into corruption in the EU".

Leigh replied: "There is no authority within the UK with the power to investigate the European institutions." Mr Watt was not impressed and quotes from the PAC's own 29th report in the session of 1998-1999 entitled *Financial Management ands Control in the European Union.*

It reveals that following the van Buitenen whistleblowing and resignation of the commission "we [the PAC members] undertook a fact-finding visit to the European institutions responsible for the management and oversight of the European budget". Among the institutions the committee met on this freebie was the court of auditors. The report concluded: "In spite of the call for changes we are concerned that there was no real belief or will to make them happen... There is also insufficient guidance on the proper conduct of public business and there are inadequate procedures to protect whistleblowers." Five years later, confronted with overwhelming evidence from a British whistleblower of such inadequate procedures, the PAC chairman says there's nothing he can do.

Mr Watt has reacted sharply to Leigh's brush-off and spent a year using his auditor's skills to expose what he alleges is a wide-ranging and interlocking system of corruption infecting the EU's institutions. One of his main gripes is that these bodies, notably the court of auditors, is remote from democratic procedures and disciplines. This explains the corruption and nepotism and arbitrary sacking of public servants who expose them, he says.

Mr Watt is shortly to send his findings in a series of letters to Edward Leigh. In the meantime he hopes Paul van Buitenen and his supporters will be elected to the European parliament where they can continue to investigate and blow the whistle without fear of victimisation.

Follow-ups... Follow-ups... Follow-ups...

■ **BUNNY PINNINGTON:** The nurse sacked after revealing a Welsh special school's "do not resuscitate" (DNR) policy has finally won recognition at an employment appeals tribunal that she was a whistleblower who suffered "an unlawful detriment" and was wrongly suspended.

However, Bunny Pinnington lost her main appeal for unfair dismissal because the appeal tribunal decided that Swansea city and county council, which ran the school, had later sacked her for subsequent long-term ill-health – not the whistleblowing.

Eye readers will recall that Mrs Pinnington had gone off sick with stress and anxiety after raising concerns over the DNR policy which she blamed on the head teacher. Mrs Pinnington was suspended and later dismissed in 1999 after she alerted the family of Anna-Marie Davies, now 10, who suffers a rare degenerative brain condition, that teaching staff (not doctors) had directed that the child should *not* be resuscitated should she collapse.

Those instructions were put in writing in an extraordinary note written by the head teacher Elizabeth Jones. It said that should Anna-Marie stop breathing she should not have her airways checked or be given mouth-to-mouth for two-and-a-half minutes. The family was horrified and withdrew Anna from the school.

At the appeal Mrs Pinnington argued that this led to a complete breakdown of her relationship with the head teacher which directly caused her ill-health. But dismissing the appeal, Judge McMullen QC said she would need to prove that the local authority had either acted maliciously or had wilfully caused her ill-health. The panel was satisfied this was not the case. It concluded that the reason for dismissal was indeed her lack of capability after 18 months off sick.

The appeal tribunal did however refer the initial suspension for whistle-blowing back to the employment tribunal.

Swansea LEA immediately boasted that it had won the appeal. And in a rather disingenuous sentence at the end of its press release dismissed the issue of Mrs Pinnington being wrongly treated as a whistleblower correctly exposing the DNR policy, as a mere "legal point". If that were the case, why is it intending to challenge it in the court of appeal?

A SHAW RETURN?

LIBERAL Democrat peer Lord Avebury obviously reads the *Eye*. On 4 May, a few days after *Eye* 1105 reported the proposed sale of Global Solutions Ltd (GSL) by Group 4 to Bridgepoint, a private equity firm advised by "new" Labour champion and former health secretary Alan Milburn, Avebury was asking questions in the House of Lords.

He wanted to know whether the government had any influence over the sale of GSL, which runs prisons and detention centres such as Yarl's Wood in Bedfordshire. Yes, replied home office minister Lord Bassam. The sale had to be approved by the home secretary, who was considering it.

Avebury also asked for an assurance that the sale would only be approved if all 29 recommendations of the recently-published Shaw inquiry into racism at Yarl's Wood are carried out. Bassam equivocated. Then, rather suddenly and without any public explanation, it emerged that GSL was not going to go to Bridgepoint at all.

It was to be flogged instead to two other mysterious private equity firms: Englefield Capital, which runs a wind farm company, an insurance firm and a property group; and Electra Partners Europe, which has scores of investments in businesses ranging from pest control to train leasing, and usually sells its interests at a hefty profit within two or three years of acquiring them.

Nothing was said by either company about whether they would implement the enormous but not necessarily profitable changes in detention centres recommended by prisons ombudsman Stephen Shaw.

ASPERGER'S

IT'S A SYN-DROME

AFTER years of campaigning by the parents of Piers Bolduc – a young man with Asperger syndrome who was incorrectly diagnosed as schizophrenic and incarcerated in Broadmoor – health chiefs have finally promised that moves are in hand to secure his release.

Stephen Ladyman, minister responsible for mental health, told Piers' MP David Liddington that he would ensure the 28-year-old (who has spent nine years in the special hospital for the criminally insane) was released as "expeditiously as possible".

That was more than a month ago; since when inertia at the home office and department of health has meant that a precious place secured for Piers at The Hayes, a special centre in Bristol for those with Asperger's (the high-achieving end of the autism spectrum) has gone to someone else. Thus Piers remains wrongly locked up for slightly wounding a young man with a penknife while taking powerful anti-psychotic drugs he should not have been prescribed.

Piers' case, first highlighted in the *Sunday Telegraph*, is far from isolated. Ladyman told the Commons that 31 people with autism, 21 of those with Asperger's, were held in three special hospitals. But many more are inappropriately detained, sectioned under the mental health act in secure psychiatric wards, hospitals, care homes and units for those with learning disabilities having suffered misdiagnosis and inappropriate treatment, often with powerful anti-psychotic drugs.

The one positive aspect of Piers' detention in Broadmoor was that his condition was recognised and steps were taken to wean him off the drug cocktail that had worsened his condition. The same cannot be said for Matthew Thomas, now 43, who has been in and out of hospital since he was 17.

Matthew was sucked into the mental health system in 1978 when a breakdown during his exams led, as with Piers, to a wrongful diagnosis. His parents, Jackie and Geoff Thomas, have been unable to get their son out of the system. Even though Asperger's was finally diagnosed nine years later, Mathew remained on the cocktail of anti-psychotics, tranquillisers and anti-depressants he has taken most of his life.

To his parents Matthew had always appeared a "bit different". But it was not until he was studying for his O levels that he suffered what everyone thought was a mental breakdown. He was taken into the Priory in Roehampton and was diagnosed as schizophrenic. His parents, then knowing nothing of Asperger syndrome, went along with the diagnosis.

It led to two prolonged sessions of electro-convulsive therapy (ECT) and a cocktail of powerful drugs – his parents list no fewer than 23 different ones in those early years. As they watched their son get worse, only one registrar dared challenge the diagnosis and suggest Matthew's schizophrenia was "atypical". His already sceptical parents read everything they could and became convinced Matthew was not schizophrenic. They sent him to the US where the diagnosis was finally overturned. Back in the UK a year later at the Maudsley, he was officially diagnosed with Asperger's and his parents were told he "did not have one schizophrenic feature".

Unlike Piers, there has been no concerted effort to break Matthew's addiction to powerful drugs and today he lives in a psychiatric special unit in Wales. "Matthew's life was stolen at 17 and for us parents it has been like a living bereavement," said his mother.

Nick Priechenfried was only 14 when he was given his first dose of anti-psychotic drugs by a GP. Although another doctor took him off them, the reprieve was shortlived. Nick was correctly diagnosed with Asperger's, but seven years later he was still sectioned and diagnosed as schizophrenic and put on the cocktail of psychiatric medicine his mother says wrecked his life.

He ended up in the medium secure unit at Horton Hospital, Epsom, with very ill and disturbed patients. Even though leading autism experts confirmed the diagnosis of Asperger's, Nick's treatment with powerful anti-psychotics continued. Following other disastrous placements, Nick eventually went to the Eric Shepherd Unit in Hertfordshire. Three years ago psychiatrists there weaned him off all medication, resulting in a huge improvement in both his mental and physical health. As Nick says: "If you are put on anti-psychotics when you do not need them, you soon develop a psychosis."

What has happened to people like Piers, Matthew and Nick is nothing short of scandalous. But it is a simple message that they and their parents have been to trying to convey to Stephen Ladyman and his fellow health chiefs. Not only is the continuing misdiagnosis, treatment and inappropriate placements for people with Asperger's devastating for those involved, it actually costs millions. An investment in proper services now – particularly with the huge increase in children being diagnosed on the autistic spectrum – would save money in the future. Why isn't the government listening?

JOY UNBOUNDED

IT IS more than four years since the *Eye* first covered the story of black PC Joy Hendricks (pictured below) and her detailed complaint of racism and sexism against the Metropolitan police.

Her chief complaint was against Sgt Mark Workman of the territorial support group (TSG). Mr Workman, with another TSG colleague, were key witnesses in a criminal prosecution of Joy Hendricks.

In court they alleged that Ms Hendricks had assaulted Sgt Workman, punching and kicking him and attacking him with a snooker cue. Joy Hendricks's story was rather different. She testified that she had been systematically racially and sexually abused in the police force, and that it was Sgt Workman who had attacked *her* with a snooker cue.

The magistrate at Horseferry Road court took five minutes to declare Joy Hendricks not guilty and release her. She took the case to a tribunal, alleging racial and sexual discrimination. That was in 2000. Now four years later, after endless postponements and legal arguments, her case has at last been settled. She is bound by a pledge to keep the details confidential; but the *Guardian* on 3 June disclosed that she is to get damages of half a million pounds plus costs.

When *Eye* 997 first ran the story in March 2000, it was read with interest by Calvin Tucker, who remembered Sgt Workman well. Mr Tucker was working for the TUC in 1986, and had gone to Wapping to supervise the picketing outside Rupert Murdoch's fortress there. While lighting a cigarette, he was arrested by Workman who accused him of setting fire to a billboard.

He was charged with arson, and the case went all the way to the court of appeal where the three judges denounced Workman's evidence as "fabricated" and criticised the Metropolitan police for not taking disciplinary action against him. Many years later, one of the judges, Macpherson, chaired the Stephen Lawrence inquiry, and found the Metropolitan police institutionally racist, an assessment that seems to get some support from the Joy Hendricks case.

FACT TO REMEMBER: Scotland Yard confirmed to the *Eye* that Mark Workman is still a serving sergeant in the territorial support group.

HARD CELL

JUST a few weeks before Norma Woods' court action over the suicide of her son in Portland Young Offenders' Institute in Dorset, the home office made a financial offer to settle the case but with no admission of liability.

In normal civil actions, Ms Woods would have had to accept the money as in most cases legal aid is withdrawn if a reasonable payment to settle is put on the table. But thanks to the human rights act, which places a duty on the state to safeguard the lives of those in its custody, that is not the case where deaths are concerned. The state must now be publicly accountable and Ms Woods was entitled to tell the home office her civil action was not about money. It was about her 18-year-old son Colin Williamson's "right to life". With the backing of the legal service commission, Ms Woods rejected the offer.

Two days before trial (and three years after Colin's death) the home office last week finally admitted that it had failed to take reasonable steps that could have prevented his death. It was also forced to admit that both the prison service internal inquiry into Colin's death and the subsequent inquest had been inadequate.

Colin – a young man with a history of self-harm, mental illness and a known suicide risk – was placed in a cell on his own against all prison service advice concerning vulnerable inmates. Minutes before he made a noose and hanged himself from his prison cell bars, he wrote to his mother and girlfriend: "I am so sorry. I feel like I am going mad in the head."

Colin, a drug addict jailed for robbery, had been diagnosed as suffering from chronic depression and was prescribed anti-depressants and pills for anxiety. He had repeatedly complained of voices in his head, telling him to kill himself. Although initially considered a serious suicide risk, a prison officer – without reference to a doctor – took Colin off special suicide scrutiny.

The internal inquiry concluded that even if medical opinion had been sought and Colin had stayed on the suicide scheme, it was "unlikely" his death would have been prevented. The inquest jury, prevented from looking at the wider issues surrounding his death, had recorded a verdict of suicide. But the home office has now accepted that both the failure to involve medical staff and the failure to ensure he was in a shared cell amounted "to a failure to take reasonable steps which could have prevented his death".

The home office also accepted that the prison service's internal investigation and the subsequent inquest breached article two of the European convention on human rights. There had been a failure to involve the family in the investigation and a failure by the coroner to allow the jury to consider the wider issues of suicide prevention policies.

On paper home office anti-suicide policies appear impressive, but the reality is that they are not always applied on the ground. With overcrowded jails, prison deaths have been reaching horrific levels. In March, when the law lords looked at the issue and extended the powers of inquests, they said the jail suicide statistics made "grim reading" – 947 in the last 14 years, 177 of whom were under 21.

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

THE return of FUKU retailer Philip Green to the front door of Marks & Spencer may have surprised the befuddled high street retailer, but it clearly came as no surprise to those who had been buying M&S shares in the previous few weeks. And it was certainly no news to those who piled in on the day of the announcement, driving the share price up by more than 50p and forcing an unhappy Green to reveal his hand at least a day early.

The last-minute informed buying was of the kind that regularly precedes a bid and suggests a "leak" from one or more of the banks or several other advisers involved. Who else has such good information?

The advisers or their friends are rightly the usual suspects whenever insider-dealing is suspected. Several insider-dealing rings have successfully operated over the years and continue to operate based on information provided by City bankers. But British regulators have never managed to get the same grip on those behind such deals as their Wall Street counterparts. The securities and exchange commission (SEC) has over the years prosecuted a succession of bankers, brokers and lawyers for dealing on inside information about their clients.

But those who provide the information and those who do the buying are only the same where morons are involved and there are few M&S morons. The usual trick is to pass the information to an unconnected party – often another adviser who will return the favour – who then puts the deal through an offshore bank or broker with no trace back and possibly beyond regulatory reach.

The financial services authority (FSA) was quick to announce its concern over the obvious "leak"; but it will be interesting to see how far it gets. We are still waiting for the result of its inquiry into who owned all those shares in Chelsea Village that were sold to Roman Abramovich a year ago to give him control and who was buying in the weeks before the done deal.

The insiders were probably out the day after Green's announcement of a possible bid if they did not sell into the rise the day before. The identities of the smarter earlier buyers may be easier to trace but even more difficult to do anything about. Most of the buying followed the disclosure in April that chairman Luc Vandevelde was on his way out – news that put M&S in play and so provides cover for any buyer of the shares between then and Green's arrival. Any Green fan – and he has many in north London and Monaco – could explain their buying by pointing to press comment and their hero's previous interest in M&S.

Embarrassingly for Green this is not the first time the share price of a bid target has risen ahead of a bid, even though he undoubtedly makes all possible efforts to prevent any leaking of his intentions and certainly does not knowingly encourage friends to buy.

Back in August 2002 Arcadia suddenly sprang to life in the two weeks before Green disclosed his initial 365p bid. The shares rose from 268p to 300p. Earlier that year they had been as high as 417p on hopes of a takeover from Green or the Icelandic retailer Bauger.

There was also frenetic activity in M&S shares in December 1999 ahead of Green's first indicated interest. M&S rose more than 50p in two days on hopes of a bid either from Green or Tesco. The price had been rising before this surge. Tesco indicated it was not interested. Green said he was only to pull out three months later.

"We have the perfect weapon to repel bidders – our Autumn Collection"

No doubt the FSA inquiry will produce no evidence of suspicious buying by any friends or associates of the shy and retiring retailer. Any such purchases – should they exist – will undoubtedly have been purely coincidental and unknown to Green.

PS: ONE of the conditions of any Green bid for M&S is that the store chain's pension fund is fully funded. M&S has already pumped £400m into the fund which still has a deficit of almost £670m.

Green knows all about the problems of having to finance pension funds for old established retailers with large workforces. The 2003 accounts for BHS, taken over by Green in 2000, revealed that its £277m pension fund under the new and more transparent FRS17 accounting rules had slipped from a surplus of £17m to a deficit of £77m. Over at Arcadia a surplus of almost £53m in 2002 on the £500m pension fund had been trimmed to just £1m by last year.

No wonder therefore Green wants to see the M&S numbers which could give him a way out if he decides for a second time to walk away from Baker Street.

THE home office is understood to be sympathetic to providing the assistance requested to the Russian authorities over their investigation into Mikhail Khodorkovsky and his oil group Yukos. The Russians are understood to have requested mutual legal assistance from Britain following their indictment of Khodorkovsky on tax evasion and fraud charges.

The Swiss authorities have already given such assistance to the Russian prosecutors, raiding Yukos offices in March and freezing bank accounts containing $5bn. Russian officials mounted a further raid on Yukos offices last week as part of an expanding tax evasion inquiry. Meanwhile Khodorkovsky's criminal trial has begun but stalled and may take months.

The Swiss raids happened the same day as key Yukos adviser Stephen Curtis died in a mysterious helicopter crash on the way to his Hampshire home. Curtis, a Mayfair lawyer, stepped in as chairman of Yukos's largest shareholder, the Gibraltar-based Group Menatep, following Khodorkovsky's arrest last October.

Suggestions in *Eye* 1102 that Curtis may have been prepared to disclose what he knew about Khodorkovsky and other Russian clients were confirmed weeks later by reports last month in *Le Monde* and the *Financial Times* (which recycled as new the details of Curtis's role in creating the offshore ownership network behind Yukos).

A worried Curtis, concerned about threats he had reportedly received from the Russian secret service, the FSB, contacted the national criminal intelligence service (NCIS) offering to provide information in return for immunity from prosecution and extradition. Whether that information would have been shared by NCIS with the Russians is unclear. What is clear is that a short time after he made contact Curtis was dead.

The circumstances of his death are certainly seen as suspicious by NCIS. But why the Russians who wanted Curtis to tell them what he knew would kill him before he told them makes little sense. The reaction of others who discovered that Curtis was about to "flip" to save himself may have been less understanding.

The air accident investigations branch (AAIB) report into the helicopter crash is not yet complete. The Curtis inquest is adjourned pending the AAIB report. The official line from the Curtis camp is that it was due to catastrophic pilot error. Others remain unconvinced.

Meanwhile with Curtis gone the Russians are still looking for the secrets he kept, which is why they want help from the British authorities. Help that would probably involve raids and searches of Curtis's Park Lane office and home, plus other Yukos linked addresses. Law enforcement sources believe this assistance will be given and possibly soon. However, it could all be a little too late.

SUNDAY Telegraph business editor Robert Peston has been remarkably sympathetic to those responsible for the "split capital" scandal and his section on occasion very well informed about their supposedly confidential dealings with the FSA. The City regulator is trying without much success to force the 21 fund managers and brokers who sold "splits" to compensate their up to 50,000 victims who lost at least £650m.

"How the FSA forced me to side with the brokers" headlined a comment column by Peston on 9 May, dismissing the FSA's case against the

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG

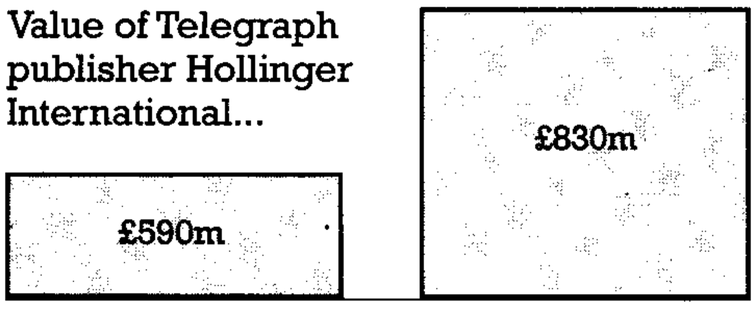
THE GOVERNMENT'S HIGHER EDUCATION REFORMS ARE VITAL...
IN ORDER TO COMPETE WITH INDIA WE NEED BRILLIANT, SUPERBLY EDUCATED GRADUATES...
PROSPECTUS
...DESPERATE ENOUGH TO WORK IN CALL CENTRE TELESALES!
164.

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

The cost of Conrad

Value of Telegraph publisher Hollinger International...



Eight months ago, when Conrad Black was in charge

Today

"splits" peddlers as unproven. "FSA confidentiality howler in split capital investment probe" was the headline the next week detailing how the hapless watchdog had supplied details of unrelated enforcement action to one of the not so guilty 21.

It is purely coincidental that Peston formerly worked for and was an original shareholder in brokers Collins, Stewart who along with Aberdeen Fund Managers are leading the resistance to the FSA compensation proposal. Both have perhaps the most to lose. It is suspected that complying with their share of the global compensation required by the FSA – £350m compared with the group of 21's generous offer of £100m – could raise serious questions about their financial future. Especially if there was further civil liability.

Indeed Peston's former involvement with Collins, Stewart and its abrasive boss Terry Smith is clearly so irrelevant that no room could be found to mention this fact in items on the "splits" scandal which have featured the business editor's by-line.

PHONEY pharaoh Mohamed Fayed has taken the advantage of soaring London property values to further increase his borrowings.

Prestige Properties, the Liechtenstein company that owns his apartment block in Park Lane next to the Dorchester Hotel, last year refinanced an existing loan from Royal Bank of Scotland for £33m. RBS was already big into Fayed as a result of almost £450m lent to Harrods and the Ritz in Paris. It may have been reluctant to increase its exposure. Enter new Fayed lender Bradford & Bingley, which it now emerges has provided a loan facility "in the region of £50m" secured on the property. That pushes Fayed's total borrowings across Harrods, the Ritz, Fulham and Prestige to probably well in excess of £500m.

BENT coppers beware. The new independent police complaints commission (IPCC) has hired none other than John Tate, the fearless Fat Controller formerly of the Serious Farce Office as its new director of legal services.

Curiously no mention is made on the IPCC's website of the Fat Controller's greatest achievement at the SFO, the acquittals of brothers Kevin and Ian Maxwell. The IPCC post may provide less opportunity for extensive foreign travel than Tate's previous sojourn as the solicitor to the soon-ending Saville inquiry into Bloody Sunday. But at least it ensures there will be no hiding place for corrupt or incompetent cops.

'Slicker'

Number crunchings

£200,000

■ Amount England's footballers will be paid if they win Euro 2004

£2 million

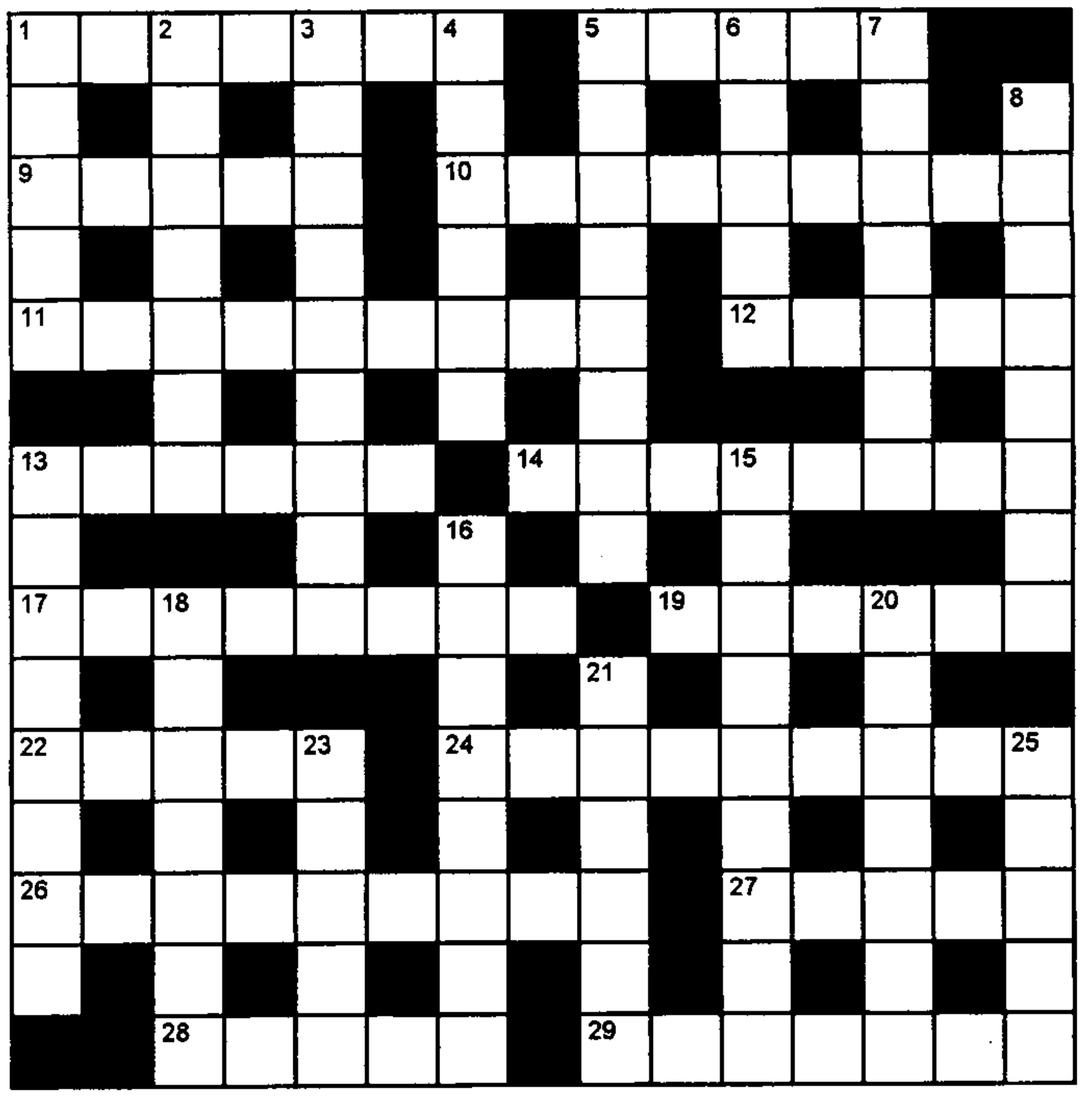
■ Amount England's footballers will be paid for appearing in adverts during Euro 2004

EYE CROSSWORD 263

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 18 June 2004.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1/5ac. One's grabbed by terrible old bat to iron rags (7,5)

9 Rubbished by *Sport*, he put his foot down (5)

10 Four-letter word possibly arising from Blair's first encounter with awkward Ashley, MP (9)

11 No sport for a hen gathering, "penis action" (9)

12 Short has desire to be Posh (5)

13 A fifty-fifty chance of Chuck getting erect (4-2)

14 Sort of rights a mate might demand of Conservative on pot (one on Michael's tail) (8)

17 Heartless Livingstone wants money? Balls! (8)

19 Bill in middle of a sixty-nine? You can count on that (6)

22 Fantastic goers, big men! (5)

24 That of the actor who "wouldn't be seen doing an ad" (5-4)

26 Figures drugs should be taken before noon (9)

27 "Extra! MPs cuddling slapper!" (5)

28/29 Not taken as a clean break by the adulterous (5,7)

DOWN

1 Subject to tabloid photo (5)

2 Eleanor & Co all over Pole – but they won't give an easy ride (7)

3 Not in love, left during bonk – unfortunate (3,2,4)

4 Removes trousers (university replacing one) and picks off insects? (6)

5 Act like bent drug squad copper as means of containing growth? (5,3)

6 Chamber's involved in kinky sex (public viewings) (5)

7 Reacting to a drunken binge turns penis green/white initially (7)

8 Magazine dumps sockets for viewers (3-5)

13 Seizure of control; needing to accept a load of balls (8)

15 Government office for one with much patience and heart? (3,6)

16 Rev. involved with tasty perversion (8)

18 Thicko broadcast supremo (7)

20 Posh nosh, having mind to eat heart of Beckham? (7)

21 'Tool positioning aid' was, on getting screwed, a puzzle (6)

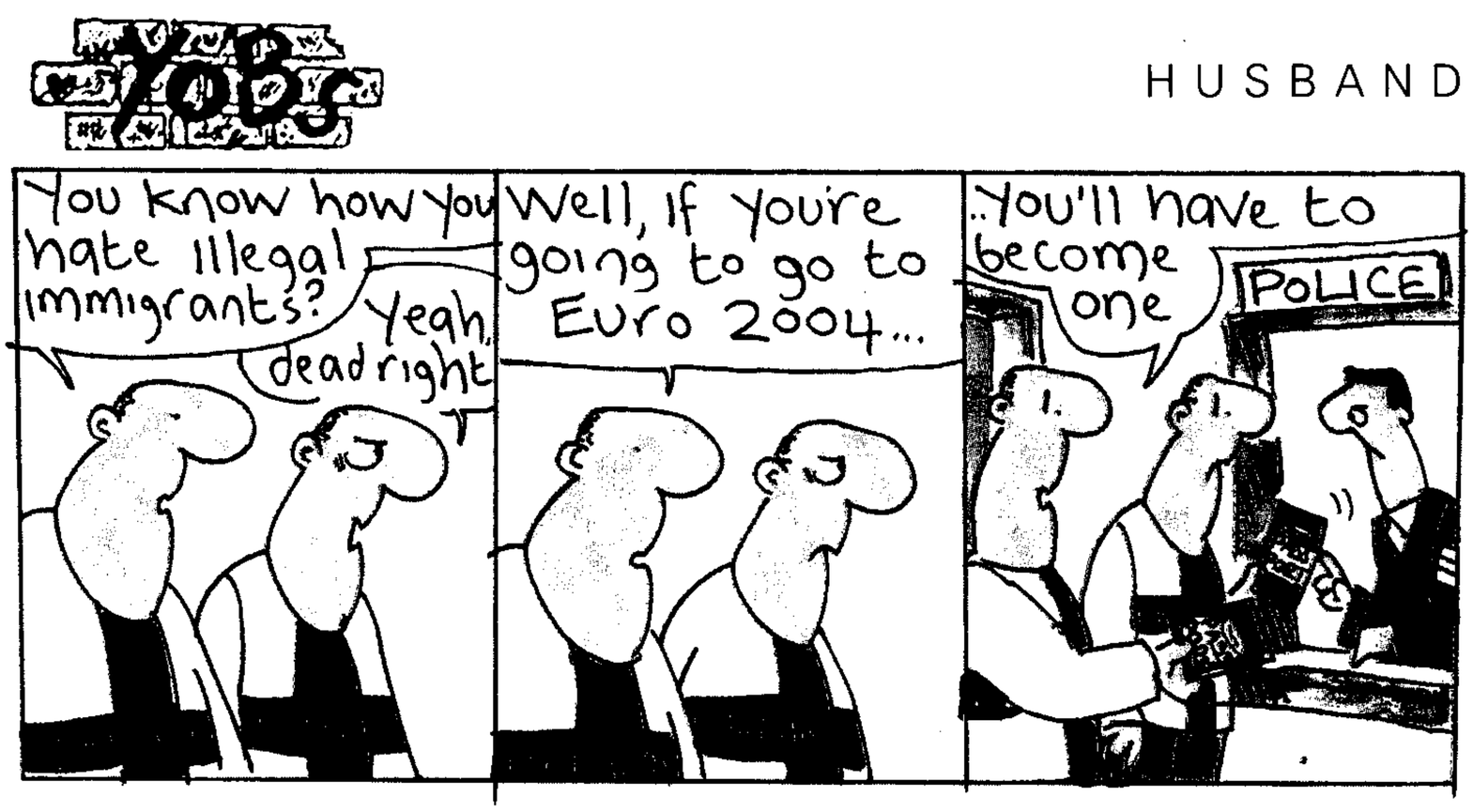
23 Streak, taking everything off (small organ) (5)

25 Went in for bondage exercises in bar (5)

Crossword 262 winner: PAUL TAYLOR

ACROSS: 1 Cocks up 5 Stigmas 9/10/21/18ac. I'm glad you asked me that question 11 Rosie 12 Handcuffs 13 Pathos 15 G-strings 19 Scoffs 22 In a pickle 24 India 26 Knife 27 Exhausted 28 Entitle 29 Tiepolo.

DOWN: 1 Chirrup 2 CS gas 3 Scapegoat 4 Psycho 5 Smugness 6 Isaac 7 Make fun of 8 Sadists 14 Therapist 16 Rectitude 17 Look here 18 Quickie 20 So and so 23 Inept 25 Ditto.



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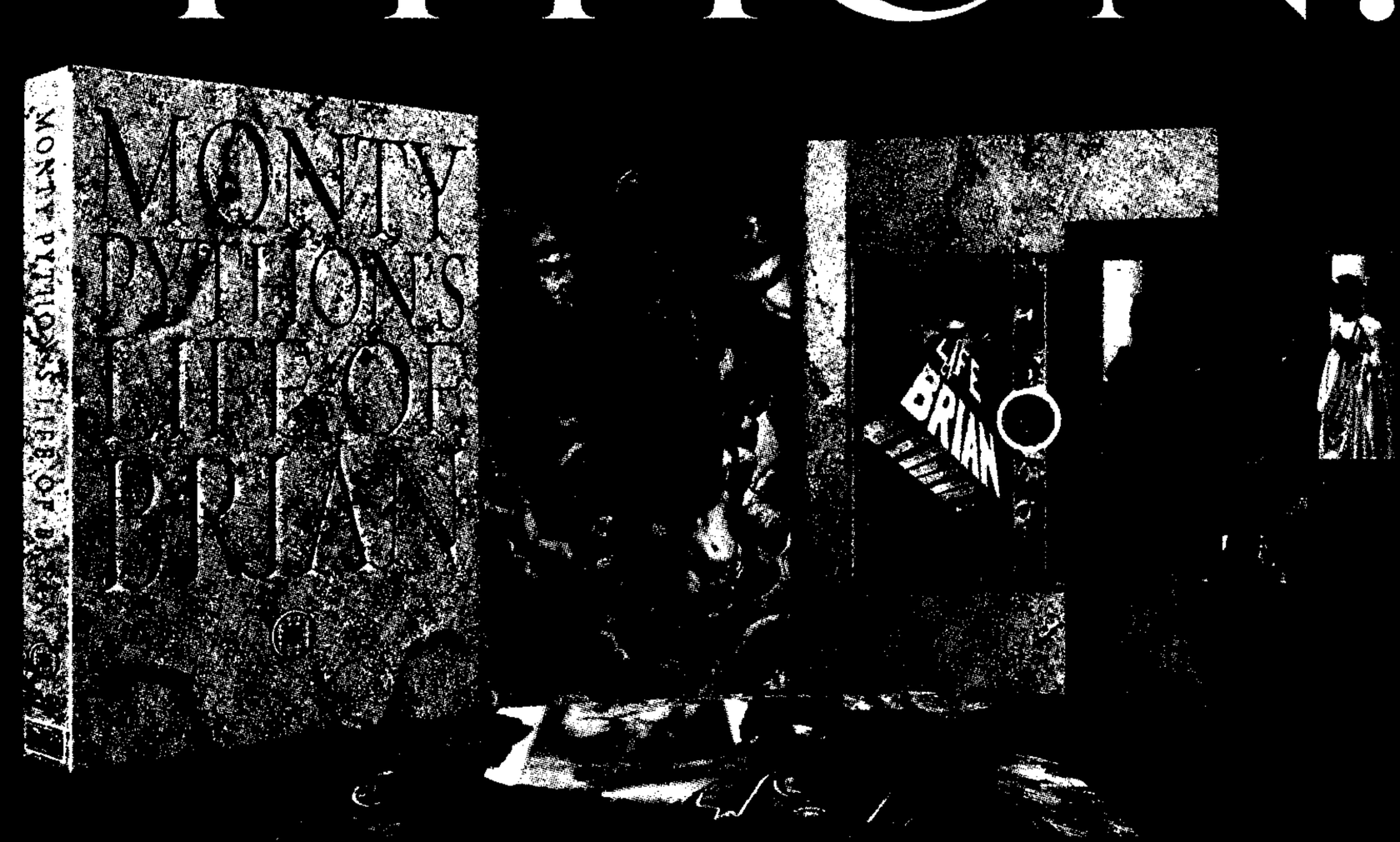

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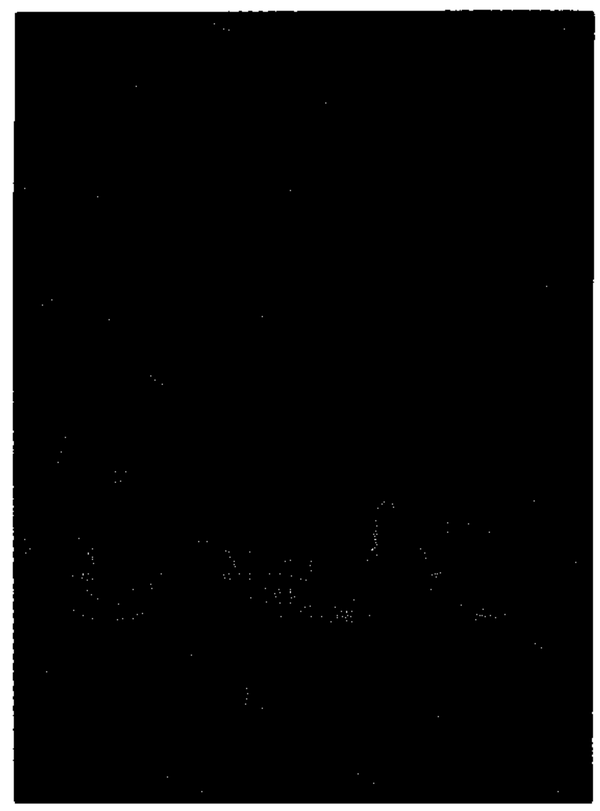

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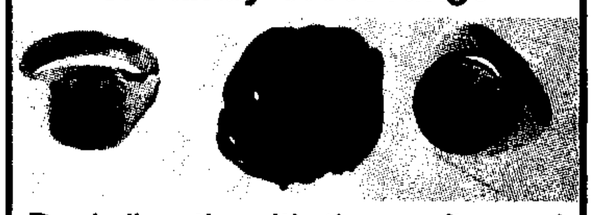

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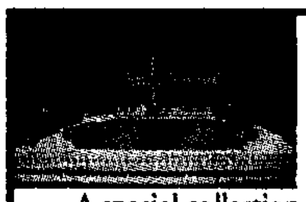

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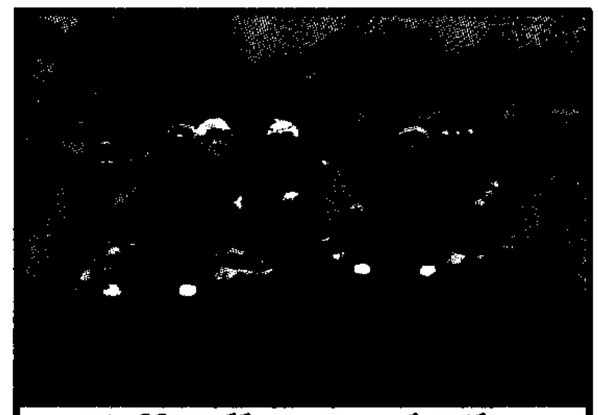

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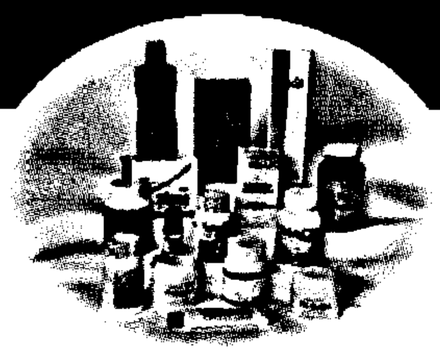

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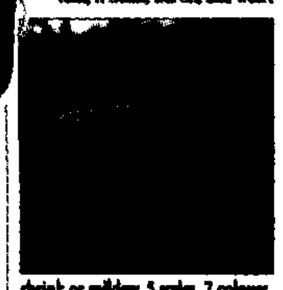

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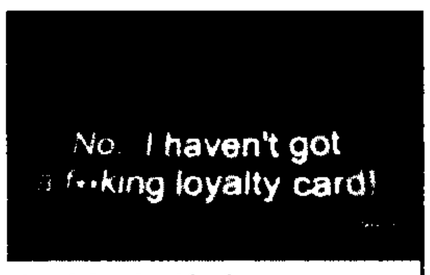

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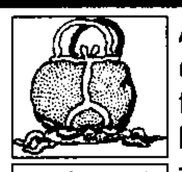

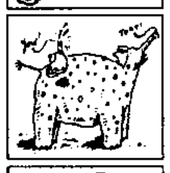

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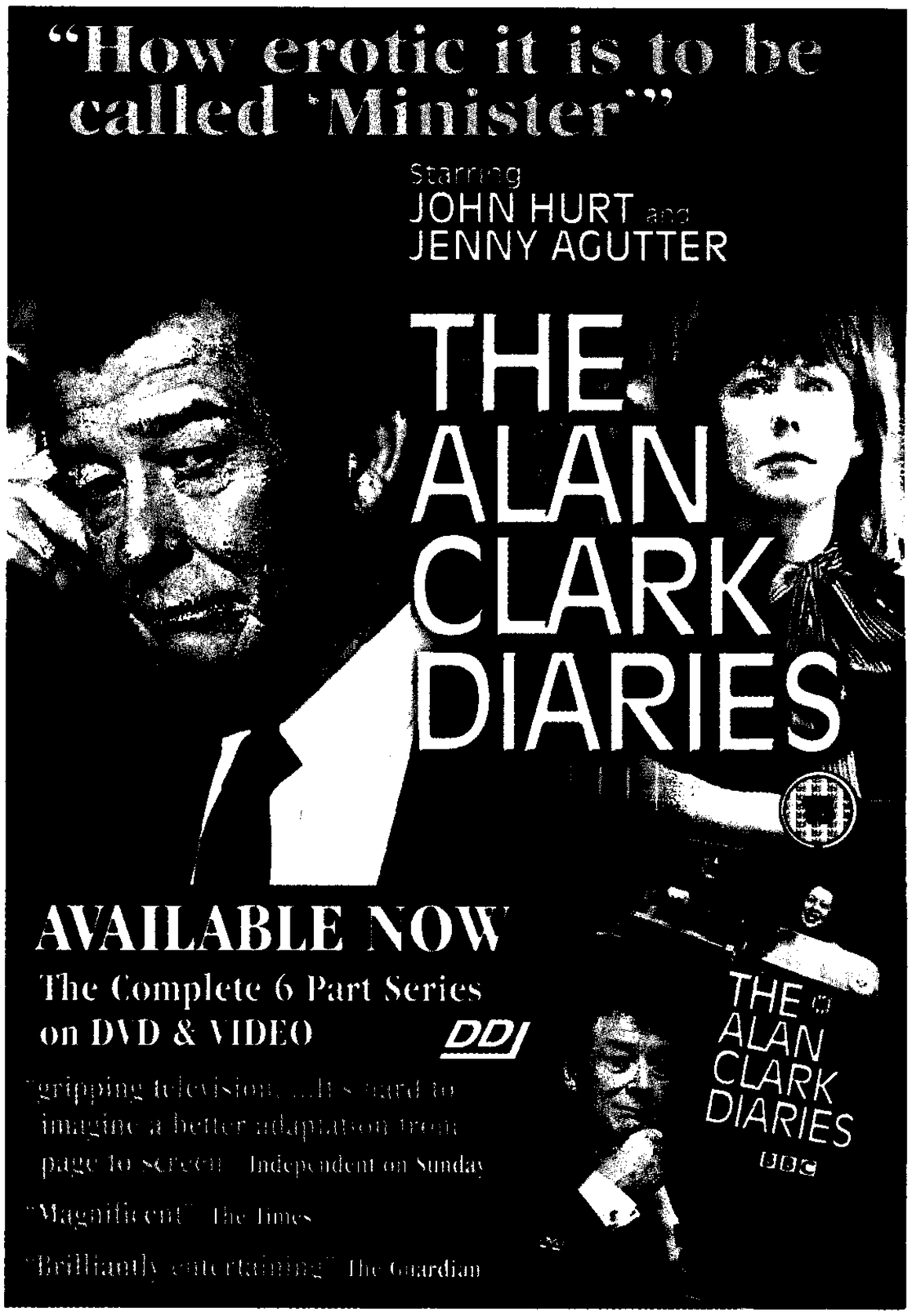
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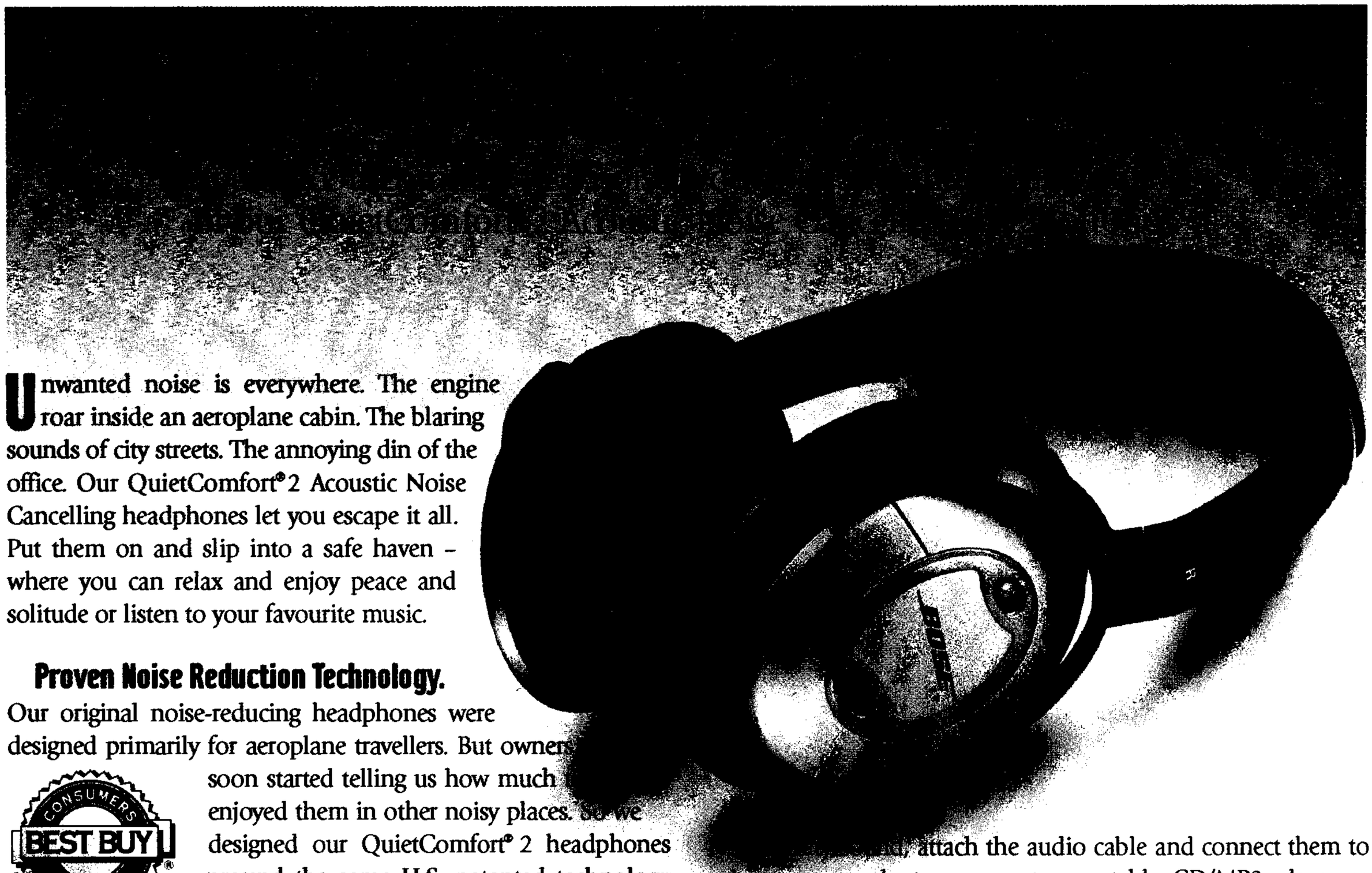

Unwanted noise is everywhere. The engine roar inside an aeroplane cabin. The blaring sounds of city streets. The annoying din of the office. Our QuietComfort®2 Acoustic Noise Cancelling headphones let you escape it all. Put them on and slip into a safe haven – where you can relax and enjoy peace and solitude or listen to your favourite music.

Proven Noise Reduction Technology.

Our original noise-reducing headphones were designed primarily for aeroplane travellers. But owners soon started telling us how much they enjoyed them in other noisy places. So we designed our QuietComfort® 2 headphones around the same U.S. patented technology to electronically identify and dramatically reduce noise, while faithfully preserving the music, movie dialogue or silence you want. The *Philadelphia Daily News* says that "Even in the noisiest environment, wearing these phones creates a calming, quiet zone for easy listening or just snoozing."

Our Best Sound Ever.

QuietComfort®2 headphones deliver the best audio performance we have ever developed for headphones. Highs are impressively

crisp and clean. Lows are deep and enveloping. Vocals are reproduced with lifelike authenticity. When audio critic Wayne Thompson heard our QuietComfort® 2 headphones, he reported, "Bose engineers have made major improvements." Whether you are looking for noise reduction or high-performance headphones for music, we think you'll agree – QuietComfort®2 headphones simply make your music sound better.

Enhanced Comfort And Portability.

Respected columnist Rich Warren says "The QuietComfort® 2 lives up to its name, enveloping you in blissful sound in the utmost comfort. It's easy to forget they're on your head." To enjoy peace and quiet, simply turn them on. To add

attach the audio cable and connect them to a home stereo, laptop computer, portable CD/MP3 player or in-flight audio system. When you are done, our new fold-flat design allows you to quickly tuck your headphones away in a bag or briefcase, so you can take them almost anywhere.

Experience Them For Yourself.

We don't expect you to take our word for how dramatically our new headphones reduce noise, how clean and full they sound or how comfortably they fit. So we invite you to try them for 30 days, satisfaction guaranteed. If you can live without them, return them for a full refund. It's that simple. Be sure to ask about our instalment plan that lets you make **4 equal payments with no interest charges from Bose.*** Pay either monthly or quarterly; the choice is yours. QuietComfort® 2 headphones – the new standard from Bose, one of the most respected names in sound.

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